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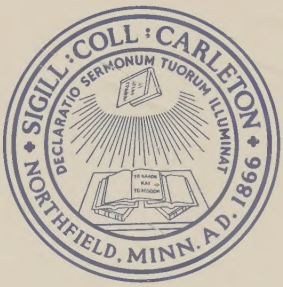
The Testing of Diana Mallory

Mrs. Humphry Ward



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"THERE SHE WAITED WHILE THE DAWN STOLE UPON THE NIGHT"

[See p. 4

The Testing of Diana Mallory

BY

MRS. HUMPHRY WARD

ILLUSTRATED BY
W. HATHERELL, R. I.

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TO

MY KIND HOSTS BEYOND THE ATLANTIC

FROM

A GRATEFUL TRAVELLER

JULY, 1908

Illustrations

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Part I

"Action is transitory—a step, a blow,
The motion of a muscle—this way or that—
'Tis done, and in the after-vacancy
We wonder at ourselves like men betrayed:
Suffering is permanent, obscure, and dark,
And shares the nature of infinity."

—The Borderers.

The Testing of Diana Mallory

CHAPTER I

THE clock in the tower of the village church had just struck the quarter. In the southeast a pale dawn light was beginning to show above the curving hollow of the down wherein the village lay enfolded; but the face of the down itself was still in darkness. Farther to the south, in a stretch of clear night sky hardly touched by the mounting dawn, Venus shone enthroned, so large and brilliant, so near to earth and the spectator, that she held, she pervaded the whole dusky scene, the shadowed fields and wintry woods, as though she were their very soul and voice.

"The Star of Bethlehem!—and Christmas Day!"

Diana Mallory had just drawn back the curtain of her bedroom. Her voice, as she murmured the words, was full of a joyous delight; eagerness and yearning expressed themselves in her bending attitude, her parted lips and eyes intent upon the star.

The panelled room behind her was dimly lit by a solitary candle, just kindled. The faint dawn in front, the flickering candle-light behind, illumined Diana's tall figure, wrapped in a white dressing-gown, her small head and slender neck, the tumbling masses of her dark hair,

and the hand holding the curtain. It was a kind and poetic light; but her youth and grace needed no softening.

After the striking of the quarter, the church bell began to ring, with a gentle, yet insistent note which gradually filled the hollows of the village, and echoed along the side of the down. Once or twice the sound was effaced by the rush and roar of a distant train; and once the call of an owl from a wood, a call melancholy and prolonged, was raised as though in rivalry. But the bell held Diana's strained ear throughout its course, till its mild clangor passed into the deeper note of the clock striking the hour, and then all sounds alike died into a profound yet listening silence.

"Eight o'clock! That was for early service," she thought; and there flashed into her mind an image of the old parish church, dimly lit for the Christmas Eucharist, its walls and pillars decorated with ivy and holly, yet austere and cold through all its adornings, with its bare walls and pale windows. She shivered a little, for her youth had been accustomed to churches all color and lights and furnishings—churches of another type and faith. But instantly some warm leaping instinct met the shrinking, and overpowered it. She smote her hands together.

"England!—England!—my own, own country!"

She dropped upon the window-seat half laughing, yet the tears in her eyes. And there, with her face pressed against the glass, she waited while the dawn stole upon the night, while in the park the trees emerged upon the grass white with rime, while on the face of the down thickets and paths became slowly visible, while the first wreaths of smoke began to curl and hover in the frosty air,

Suddenly, on a path which climbed the hill-side till it was lost in the beech wood which crowned the summit, she saw a flock of sheep, and behind them a shepherd boy running from side to side. At the sight, her eyes kindled again. "Nothing changes," she thought, "in this country life!" On the morning of Charles I.'s execution—in the winters and springs when Elizabeth was Queen—while Becket lay dead on Canterbury steps —when Harold was on his way to Senlac—that hill, that path were there—sheep were climbing it, and shepherds were herding them. "It has been so since England began—it will be so when I am dead. We are only shadows that pass. But England lives always—always—and shall live!"

And still, in a trance of feeling, she feasted her eyes on the quiet country scene.

The old house which Diana Mallory had just begun to inhabit stood upon an upland, but it was an upland so surrounded by hills to north and east and south that it seemed rather a close-girt valley, leaned over and sheltered by the downs. Pastures studded with trees sloped away from the house on all sides; the village was hidden from it by boundary woods; only the church tower emerged. From the deep oriel window where she sat Diana could see a projecting wing of the house itself, its mellowed red brick, its Jacobean windows and roof. She could see also a corner of the moat with its running stream, a moat much older than the building it encircled, and beneath her eyes lay a small formal garden planned in the days of John Evelyn—with its fountain and its sundial, and its beds in arabesque. The cold light of December lay upon it all; there was no special beauty in the landscape, and no magnificence in the house or its

surroundings. But every detail of what she saw pleased the girl's taste, and satisfied her heart. All the while she was comparing it with other scenes and another landscape, amid which she had lived till now—a monotonous blue sea, mountains scorched and crumbled by the sun, dry palms in hot gardens, roads choked with dust and tormented with a plague of motor-cars, white villas crowded among high walls, a wilderness of hotels, and everywhere a chattering unlovely crowd.

"Thank goodness!—that's done with," she thought—only to fall into a sudden remorse. "Papa—papa!—if you were only here too!"

She pressed her hands to her eyes, which were moist with sudden tears. But the happiness in her heart overcame the pang, sharp and real as it was. Oh! how blessed to have done with the Riviera, and its hybrid empty life, for good and all!—how blessed even, to have done with the Alps and Italy!—how blessed, above all, to have come *home!*—home into the heart of this English land—warm mother-heart, into which she, stranger and orphan, might creep and be at rest.

The eloquence of her own thoughts possessed her. They flowed on in a warm, mute rhetoric, till suddenly the Comic Spirit was there, and patriotic rapture began to see itself. She, the wanderer, the exile, what did she know of England—or England of her? What did she know of this village even, this valley in which she had pitched her tent? She had taken an old house, because it had pleased her fancy, because it had Tudor gables, pretty panelling, and a sundial. But what natural link had she with it, or with these peasants and countrymen? She had no true roots here. What she had done was mere whim and caprice. She was an alien, like anybody

else—like the new men and prowling millionaires, who bought old English properties, moved thereto by a feeling which was none the less snobbish because it was also sentimental.

She drew herself up—rebelling hotly—yet not seeing how to disentangle herself from these associates. And she was still struggling to put herself back in the romantic mood, and to see herself and her experiment anew in the romantic light, when her maid knocked at the door, and distraction entered with letters, and a cup of tea.

An hour later Miss Mallory left her room behind her, and went tripping down the broad oak staircase of Beechcote Manor.

By this time romance was uppermost again, and self-congratulation. She was young—just twenty-two; she was—she knew it—agreeable to look upon; she had as much money as any reasonable woman need want; she had already seen a great deal of the world outside England; and she had fallen headlong in love with this charming old house, and had now, in spite of various difficulties, managed to possess herself of it, and plant her life in it. Full of ghosts it might be; but *she* was its living mistress henceforth; nor was it either ridiculous or snobbish that she should love it and exult in it—quite the contrary. And she paused on the slippery stairs, to admire the old panelled hall below, the play of wintry sunlight on the oaken surfaces she herself had rescued from desecrating paint, and the effect of some old Persian rugs, which had only arrived from London the night before, on the dark polished boards. For Diana, there were two joys connected with the old house: the joy of entering in, a

stranger and conqueror, on its guarded and matured beauty, and the joy of adding to that beauty by a deft modernness. Very deft, and tender, and skilful it must be. But no one could say that time-worn Persian rugs, with their iridescent blue and greens and rose reds—or old Italian damask and cut-velvet from Genoa, or Florence, or Venice—were out of harmony with the charming Jacobean rooms. It was the horrible furniture of the Vavasours, the ancestral possessors of the place, which had been an offence and a disfigurement. In moving it out and replacing it, Diana felt that she had become the spiritual child of the old house, in spite of her alien blood. There is a kinship not of the flesh; and it thrilled all through her.

But just as her pause of daily homage to the place in which she found herself was over, and she was about to run down the remaining stairs to the dining-room, a new thought delayed her for a moment by the staircase window—the thought of a lady who would no doubt be waiting for her at the breakfast-table.

Mrs. Colwood, Miss Mallory's new chaperon and companion, had arrived the night before, on Christmas Eve. She had appeared just in time for dinner, and the two ladies had spent the evening together. Diana's first impressions had been pleasant—yes, certainly, pleasant; though Mrs. Colwood had been shy, and Diana still more so. There could be no question but that Mrs. Colwood was refined, intelligent, and attractive. Her gentle, almost childish looks appealed for her. So did her deep black, and the story which explained it. Diana had heard of her from a friend in Rome, where Mrs. Colwood's husband, a young Indian Civil servant, had died of fever and lung mischief, on his way to England for a long sick

leave and where the little widow had touched the hearts of all who came in contact with her.

Diana thought, with one of her ready compunctions, that she had not been expansive enough the night before. She ran down-stairs, determined to make Mrs. Colwood feel at home at once.

When she entered the dining-room the new companion was standing beside the window looking out upon the formal garden and the lawn beyond it. Her attitude was a little drooping, and as she turned to greet her hostess and employer, Diana's quick eyes seemed to perceive a trace of recent tears on the small face. The girl was deeply touched, though she made no sign. Poor little thing! A widow, and childless, in a strange place.

Mrs. Colwood, however, showed no further melancholy. She was full of admiration for the beauty of the frosty morning, the trees touched with rime, the browns and purples of the distant woods. She spoke shyly, but winningly, of the comfort of her room, and the thoughtfulness with which Miss Mallory had arranged it; she could not say enough of the picturesqueness of the house. Yet there was nothing fulsome in her praise. She had the gift which makes the saying of sweet and flattering things appear the merest simplicity. They escaped her whether she would or no—that at least was the impression; and Diana found it agreeable. So agreeable that before they had been ten minutes at table Miss Mallory, in response, was conscious on her own part of an unusually strong wish to please her new companion—to make a good effect. Diana, indeed, was naturally governed by the wish to please. She desired above all things to be liked—that is, if she could not be loved.

Mrs. Colwood brought with her a warm and favoring atmosphere. Diana unfolded.

In the course of this first exploratory conversation, it appeared that the two ladies had many experiences in common. Mrs. Colwood had been two years, her two short years of married life, in India; Diana had travelled there with her father. Also, as a girl, Mrs. Colwood had spent a winter at Cannes, and another at Santa Margherita. Diana expressed with vehemence her weariness of the Riviera; but the fact that Mrs. Colwood differed from her led to all the more conversation.

"My father would never come home," sighed Diana. "He hated the English climate, even in summer. Every year I used to beg him to let us go to England. But he never would. We lived abroad, first, I suppose, for his health, and then—I can't explain it. Perhaps he thought he had been so long away he would find no old friends left. And indeed so many of them had died. But whenever I talked of it he began to look old and ill. So I never could press it—never!"

The girl's voice fell to a lower note — musical, and full of memory. Mrs. Colwood noticed the quality of it.

"Of course if my mother had lived," said Diana, in the same tone, "it would have been different."

"But she died when you were a child?"

"Eighteen years ago. I can just remember it. We were in London then. Afterwards father took me abroad, and we never came back. Oh! the waste of all those years!"

"Waste?" Mrs. Colwood probed the phrase a little. Diana insisted, first with warmth, and then with an eloquence that startled her companion, that for an Eng-

lishwoman to be brought up outside England, away from country and countrymen, was to waste and forego a hundred precious things that might have been gathered up. "I used to be ashamed when I talked to English people. Not that we saw many. We lived for years and years at a little villa near Rapallo, and in the summer we used to go up into the mountains, away from everybody. But after we came back from a long tour, we lived for a time at a hotel in Mentone—our own little house was let—and I used to talk to people there—though papa never liked making friends. And I made ridiculous mistakes about English things—and they'd laugh. But one can't know—unless one has *lived*—has breathed in a country, from one's birth. That's what I've lost."

Mrs. Colwood demurred.

"Think of the people who wish they had grown up without ever reading or hearing about the Bible, so that they might read it for the first time, when they could really understand it. You *feel* England all the more intensely now because you come fresh to her."

Diana sprang up, with a change of face—half laugh, half frown.

"Yes, I feel her! Above all, I feel her enemies!"

She let in her dog, a fine collie, who was scratching at the door. As she stood before the fire, holding up a biscuit for him to jump at, she turned a red and conscious face towards her companion. The fire in the eyes, the smile on the lip seemed to say:

"There!—now we have come to it. This is my passion—my hobby—this is *me!*"

"Her enemies! You are political?"

"Desperately!"

"A Tory?"

"Fanatical. But that's only part of it, 'What should they know of England, that only England know!'"

Miss Mallory threw back her head with a gesture that became it.

"Ah, I see,—an Imperialist?"

Diana nodded, smiling. She had seated herself in a chair by the fireside. Her dog's head was on her knees, and one of her slender hands rested on the black and tan. Mrs. Colwood admired the picture. Miss Mallory's sloping shoulders and long waist were well shown by her simple dress of black and closely fitting serge. Her head crowned and piled with curly black hair, carried itself with an amazing self-possesion and pride, which was yet all feminine. This young woman might talk politics, thought her new friend; no male man would call her prater, while she bore herself with that air. Her eyes—the chaperon noticed it for the first time—owed some of their remarkable intensity, no doubt, to short sight. They were large, finely colored and thickly fringed, but their slightly veiled concentration suggested an habitual, though quite unconscious *struggle to see*—with that clearness which the mind behind demanded of them. The complexion was a clear brunette, the cheeks rosy; the nose was slightly tilted, the mouth fresh and beautiful though large; and the face of a lovely oval. Altogether, an aspect of rich and glowing youth: no perfect beauty; but something arresting, ardent—charged, perhaps overcharged, with personality. Mrs. Colwood said to herself that life at Beechcote would be no stagnant pool.

While they lingered in the drawing-room before church, she kept Diana talking. It seemed that Miss Mallory had seen Egypt, India, and Canada, in the course of her last two years of life with her father. Their

travels had spread over more than a year; and Diana had brought Mr. Mallory back to the Riviera, only, it appeared, to die, after some eight months of illness. But in securing to her that year of travel, her father had bestowed his last and best gift upon her. Aided by his affection, and stimulated by his knowledge, her mind and character had rapidly developed. And, as through a natural outlet, all her starved devotion for the England she had never known, had spent itself upon the Englands she found beyond the seas; upon the hard-worked soldiers and civilians in lonely Indian stations, upon the captains of English ships, upon the pioneers of Canadian fields and railways; upon England, in fact, as the arbiter of oriental faiths—the wrestler with the desert—the mother and maker of new states. A passion for the work of her race beyond these narrow seas—a passion of sympathy, which was also a passion of antagonism, since every phase of that work, according to Miss Mallory, had been dogged by the hate and calumny of base minds—expressed itself through her charming mouth, with a quite astonishing fluency. Mrs. Colwood's mind moved uneasily. She had expected an orphan girl, ignorant of the world, whom she might mother, and perhaps mould. She found a young Egeria, talking politics with raised color and a throbbing voice, as other girls might talk of lovers or chiffons. Egeria's companion secretly and with some alarm reviewed her own equipment in these directions. Miss Mallory discoursed of India. Mrs. Colwood had lived in it. But her husband had entered the Indian Civil Service, simply in order that he might have money enough to marry her. And during their short time together, they had probably been more keenly alive to the depreciation of the

rupee than to ideas of England's imperial mission. But Herbert had done his duty, of course he had. Once or twice as Miss Mallory talked the little widow's eyes filled with tears again unseen. The Indian names Diana threw so proudly into air were, for her companion, symbols of heart-break and death. But she played her part; and her comments and interjections were all that was necessary to keep the talk flowing.

In the midst of it voices were suddenly heard outside. Diana started.

"Carols!" she said, with flushing cheeks. "The first time I have heard them in England itself!"

She flew to the hall, and threw the door open. A handful of children appeared shouting "Good King Wenceslas" in a hideous variety of keys. Miss Mallory heard them with enthusiasm; then turned to the butler behind her.

"Give them a shilling, please, Brown."

A quick change passed over the countenance of the man addressed.

"Lady Emily, ma'am, never gave more than threepence."

This stately person had formerly served the Vavasours, and was much inclined to let his present mistress know it.

Diana looked disappointed, but submissive.

"Oh, very well, Brown—I don't want to alter any of the old ways. But I hear the choir will come up to-night. Now they must have five shillings—and supper, please, Brown."

Brown drew himself up a little more stiffly.

"Lady Emily always gave 'em supper, ma'am, but, begging your pardon, she didn't hold at all with giving 'em money."

"Oh, I don't care!" said Miss Mallory, hastily. "I'm sure they'll like it, Brown! Five shillings, please."

Brown withdrew, and Diana, with a laughing face and her hands over her ears, to mitigate the farewell bawling of the children, turned to Mrs. Colwood, with an invitation to dress for church.

"The first time for me," she explained. "I have been coming up and down, for a month or more, two or three days at a time, to see to the furnishing. But now I am *at home!*"

The Christmas service in the parish church was agreeable enough. The Beechcote pew was at the back of the church, and as the new mistress of the old house entered and walked down the aisle, she drew the eyes of a large congregation of rustics and small shopkeepers. Diana moved in a kind of happy absorption, glancing gently from side to side. This gathering of villagers was to her representative of a spiritual and national fellowship to which she came now to be joined. The old church, wreathed in ivy and holly; the tombs in the southern aisle; the loaves standing near the porch for distribution after service, in accordance with an old benefaction; the fragments of fifteenth-century glass in the windows; the school-children to her left; the singing, the prayers, the sermon—found her in a welcoming, a child-like mood. She knelt, she sang, she listened, like one undergoing initiation, with a tender aspiring light in her eyes, and an eager mobility of expression.

Mrs. Colwood was more critical. The clergyman who preached the sermon did not, in fact, please her at all. He was a thin High Churchman, with an oblong face and head, narrow shoulders, and a spare frame. He wore

spectacles, and his voice was disagreeably pitched. His sermon was nevertheless remarkable. A bare yet penetrating style; a stern view of life; the voice of a prophet, and apparently the views of a socialist—all these he possessed. None of them, it might have been thought, were especially fitted to capture either the female or the rustic mind. Yet it could not be denied that the congregation was unusually good for a village church; and by the involuntary sigh which Miss Mallory gave as the sermon ended, Mrs. Colwood was able to gauge the profound and docile attention with which one at least had listened to it.

After church there was much lingering in the churchyard for the exchange of Christmas greetings. Mrs. Colwood found herself introduced to the Vicar, Mr. Lavery; to a couple of maiden ladies of the name of Bertram, who seemed to have a good deal to do with the Vicar, and with the Church affairs of the village; and to an elderly couple, Dr. and Mrs. Roughsedge, white-haired, courteous, and kind, who were accompanied by a soldier son, in whom it was evident they took a boundless pride. The young man, of a handsome and open countenance, looked at Miss Mallory as much as good manners allowed. She, however, had eyes for no one but the Vicar, with whom she started, *tête-à-tête*, in the direction of the Vicarage.

Mrs. Colwood followed, shyly making acquaintance with the Roughsedges, and the elder Miss Bertram. That lady was tall, fair, and faded; she had a sharp, handsome nose, and a high forehead; and her eyes, which hardly ever met those of the person with whom she talked, gave the impression of a soul preoccupied, with few or none of the ordinary human curiosities.

Mrs. Roughsedge, on the other hand, was most human, motherly, and inquisitive. She wore two curls on either side of her face held by small combs, a large bonnet, and an ample cloak. It was clear that whatever adoration she could spare from her husband was lavished on her son. But there was still enough good temper and good will left to overflow upon the rest of mankind. She perceived in a moment that Mrs. Colwood was the new "companion" to the heiress, that she was a widow, and sad—in spite of her cheerfulness.

"Now I hope Miss Mallory is going to *like* us!" she said, with a touch of confidential good-humor, as she drew Mrs. Colwood a little behind the others. "We are all in love with her already. But she must be patient with us. We're very humdrum folk!"

Mrs. Colwood could only say that Miss Mallory seemed to be in love with everything—the house, the church, the village, and the neighbors. Mrs. Roughsedge shook her gray curls, smiling, as she replied that this was no doubt partly due to novelty. After her long residence abroad, Miss Mallory was—it was very evident—glad to come home. Poor thing—she must have known a great deal of trouble—an only child, and no mother! "Well, I'm sure if there's anything *we* can do—"

Mrs. Roughsedge nodded cheerfully towards her husband and son in front. The gesture awakened a certain natural reserve in Mrs. Colwood, followed by a quick feeling of amusement with herself that she should so soon have developed the instinct of the watch-dog. But it was not to be denied that the new mistress of Beechcote was well endowed, as single women go. Fond mothers with marriageable sons might require some handling.

But Mrs. Roughsedge's simple kindness soon baffled distrust. And Mrs. Colwood was beginning to talk freely, when suddenly the Vicar and Miss Mallory in front came to a stop. The way to the Vicarage lay along a side road. The Roughsedges also, who had walked so far for sociability's sake, must return to the village and early dinner. The party broke up. Miss Mallory, as she made her good-byes, appeared a little flushed and discomposed. But the unconscious fire in her glance, and the vigor of her carriage, did but add to her good looks. Captain Roughsedge, as he touched her hand, asked whether he should find her at home that afternoon if he called, and Diana absently said yes.

"What a strange impracticable man!" cried Miss Mallory hotly, as the ladies turned into the Beechcote drive. "It is really a misfortune to find a man of such opinions in this place."

"The Vicar?" said Mrs. Colwood, bewildered.

"A Little Englander!—a *socialist!* And so *rude* too! I asked him to let me help him with his poor—and he threw back my offers in my face. What they wanted, he said, was not charity, but justice. And justice apparently means cutting up the property of the rich, and giving it to the poor. Is it my fault if the Vavasours neglected their cottages? I just mentioned emigration, and he foamed! I am sure he would give away the Colonies for a pinch of soap, and abolish the Army and Navy tomorrow."

Diana's face glowed with indignation—with wounded feeling besides. Mrs. Colwood endeavored to soothe her, but she remained grave and rather silent for some time. The flow of Christmas feeling and romantic pleasure had been arrested, and the memory of a harsh

personality haunted the day. In the afternoon, however, in the unpacking of various pretty knick-knacks, and in the putting away of books and papers, Diana recovered herself. She flitted about the house, arranging her favorite books, hanging pictures, and disposing embroideries. The old walls glowed afresh under her hand, and from the combination of their antique beauty with her young taste, a home began to emerge, stamped with a woman's character and reflecting her enthusiasms. As she assisted in the task, Mrs. Colwood learned many things. She gathered that Miss Mallory read two or three languages, that she was passionately fond of French memoirs and the French classics, that her father had taught her Latin and German, and guided every phase of her education. Traces indeed of his poetic and scholarly temper were visible throughout his daughter's possessions —so plainly, that at last as they came nearly to the end of the books, Diana's gayety once more disappeared. She moved soberly and dreamily, as though the past returned upon her; and once or twice Mrs. Colwood came upon her standing motionless, her finger in an open book, her eyes wandering absently through the casement windows to the distant wall of hill. Sometimes, as she bent over the books and packets she would say little things, or quote stories of her father, which seemed to show a pretty wish on her part to make the lady who was now to be her companion understand something of the feelings and memories on which her life was based. But there was dignity in it all, and, besides, a fundamental awe and reserve. Mrs. Colwood seemed to see that there were remembrances connected with her father far too poignant to be touched in speech.

At tea-time Captain Roughsedge appeared. Mrs. Col-

wood's first impression of his good manners and good looks was confirmed. But his conversation could not be said to flow: and in endeavoring to entertain him the two ladies fought a rather uphill fight. Then Diana discovered that he belonged to the Sixtieth Rifles, whereupon the young lady disclosed a knowledge of the British Army, and its organization, which struck her visitor as nothing short of astounding. He listened to her open-mouthed while she rattled on, mainly to fill up the gaps in his own remarks; and when she paused, he bluntly complimented her on her information. "Oh, that was papa!" said Diana, with a smile and a sigh. "He taught me all he could about the Army, though he himself had only been a Volunteer. There was an old *History of the British Army* I was brought up on. It was useful when we went to India—because I knew so much about the regiments we came across."

This accomplishment of hers proved indeed a god-send; the young man found his tongue; and the visit ended much better than it began.

As he said good-bye, he looked round the drawing-room in wonderment.

"How you've altered it! The Vavasours made it hideous. But I've only been in this room twice before, though my people have lived here thirty years. We were never smart enough for Lady Emily."

He colored as he spoke, and Diana suspected in him a memory of small past humiliations. Evidently he was sensitive as well as shy.

"Hard work — dear young man!" she said, with a smile, and a stretch, as the door closed upon him. "But after all—'*que j'aime le militaire*'! Now, shall we go back to work?"

There were still some books to unpack. Presently Mrs. Colwood found herself helping to carry a small but heavy box of papers to the sitting-room which Diana had arranged for herself next to her bedroom. Mrs. Colwood noticed that before Diana asked her assistance she dismissed her new maid, who had been till then actively engaged in the unpacking. Miss Mallory herself unlocked the trunk in which the despatch-box had arrived, and took it out. The box had an old green baize covering which was much frayed and worn. Diana placed it on the floor of her bedroom, where Mrs. Colwood had been helping her in various unpackings, and went away for a minute to clear a space for it in the locked wall-cupboard to which it was to be consigned. Her companion, left alone, happened to see that an old mended tear in the green baize had given way in Diana's handling of the box, and quite involuntarily her eyes caught a brass plate on the morocco lid, which bore the words, "Sparling papers." Diana came back at the moment, and perceived the uncovered label. She flushed a little, hesitated, and then said, looking first at the label and then at Mrs. Colwood: "I think I should like you to know—my name was not always Mallory. We were Sparlings—but my father took the name of Mallory after my mother's death. It was *his* mother's name, and there was an old Mallory uncle who left him a property. I believe he was glad to change his name. He never spoke to me of any Sparling relations. He was an only child, and I always suppose his father must have been very unkind to him—and that they quarrelled. At any rate, he quite dropped the name, and never would let me speak of it. My mother had hardly any relations either—only one sister who married and went

to Barbadoes. So our old name was very soon forgotten. And please"—she looked up appealingly—"now that I have told you, will you forget it too? It always seemed to hurt papa to hear it, and I never could bear to do—or say—anything that gave him pain."

She spoke with a sweet seriousness. Mrs. Colwood, who had been conscious of a slight shock of puzzled recollection, gave an answer which evidently pleased Diana, for the girl held out her hand and pressed that of her companion; then they carried the box to its place, and were leaving the room, when suddenly Diana, with a joyous exclamation, pounced on a book which was lying on the floor, tumbled among a dozen others recently unpacked.

"Mr. Marsham's Rossetti! I *am* glad. Now I can face him!"

She looked up all smiles.

"Do you know that I am going to take you to a party next week?—to the Marshams? They live near here—at Tallyn Hall. They have asked us for two nights—Thursday to Saturday. I hope you won't mind."

"Have I got a dress?" said Mrs. Colwood, anxiously.

"Oh, that doesn't matter!—not at the Marshams. I *am* glad!" repeated Diana, fondling the book—"If I really had lost it, it would have given him a horrid advantage!"

"Who is Mr. Marsham?"

"A gentleman we got to know at Rapallo," said Diana, still smiling to herself. "He and his mother were there last winter. Father and I quarrelled with him all day long. He is the worst Radical I ever met, but—"

"But?—but agreeable?"

"Oh yes," said Diana, uncertainly, and Mrs. Colwood thought she colored—"oh yes—agreeable!"

"And he lives near here?"

"He is the member for the division. Such a crew as we shall meet there!" Diana laughed out. "I had better warn you. But they have been very kind. They called directly they knew I had taken the house. 'They' means Mr. Oliver Marsham and his mother. I *am* glad I've found his book!" She went off embracing it.

Mrs. Colwood was left with two impressions—one sharp, the other vague. One was that Mr. Oliver Marsham might easily become a personage in the story of which she had just, as it were, turned the first leaf. The other was connected with the name on the despatch-box. Why did it haunt her? It had produced a kind of indistinguishable echo in the brain, to which she could put no words—which was none the less dreary; like a voice of wailing from a far-off past.

CHAPTER II

DURING the days immediately following her arrival at Beechcote, Mrs. Colwood applied herself to a study of Miss Mallory and her surroundings—none the less penetrating because the student was modest and her method unperceived. She divined a nature unworldly, impulsive, steeped, moreover, for all its spiritual and intellectual force, which was considerable, in a kind of sensuous romance—much connected with concrete things and symbols, places, persons, emblems, or relics, any contact with which might at any time bring the color to the girl's cheeks and the tears to her eyes. *Honor*—personal or national—the word was to Diana like a spark to dry leaves. Her whole nature flamed to it, and there were moments when she walked visibly transfigured in the glow of it. Her mind was rich, moreover, in the delicate, inchoate lovers, the half-poetic, half-intellectual passions, the mystical yearnings and aspirations, which haunt a pure expanding youth. Such human beings, Mrs. Colwood reflected, are not generally made for happiness. But there were also in Diana signs both of practical ability and of a rare common-sense. Would this last avail to protect her from her enthusiasms? Mrs. Colwood remembered a famous Frenchwoman of whom it was said: "Her *judgment* is infallible—her *conduct* one long mistake!" The little companion was already sufficiently attached to Miss Mallory to hope

that in this case a natural tact and balance might not be thrown away.

As to suitors and falling in love, the natural accompaniments of such a charming youth, Mrs. Colwood came across no traces of anything of the sort. During her journey with her father to India, Japan, and America, Miss Mallory had indeed for the first time seen something of society. But in the villa beside the Mediterranean it was evident that her life with her father had been one of complete seclusion. She and he had lived for each other. Books, sketching, long walks, a friendly interest in their peasant neighbors—these had filled their time.

It took, indeed, but a short time to discover in Miss Mallory a hunger for society which seemed to be the natural result of long starvation. With her neighbors the Roughsedges she was already on the friendliest terms. To Dr. Roughsedge, who was infirm, and often a prisoner to his library, she paid many small attentions which soon won the heart of an old student. She was in love with Mrs. Roughsedge's gray curls and motherly ways; and would consult her about servants and tradesmen with an eager humility. She liked the son, it seemed, for the parents' sake, nor was it long before he was allowed—at his own pressing request—to help in hanging pictures and arranging books at Beechcote. A girl's manner with young men is always a matter of interest to older women. Mrs. Colwood thought that Diana's manner to the young soldier could not have been easily bettered. It was frank and gay—with just that tinge of old-fashioned reserve which might be thought natural in a girl of gentle breeding, brought up alone by a fastidious father. With all her impetuosity, indeed, there was

about her something markedly virginal and remote, which is commoner, perhaps, in Irish than English women. Mrs. Colwood watched the effect of it on Captain Roughsedge. After her third day of acquaintance with him, she said to herself: "He will fall in love with her!" But she said it with compassion, and without troubling to speculate on the lady. Whereas, with regard to the Marsham visit, she already — she could hardly have told why—found herself full of curiosity.

Meanwhile, in the few days which elapsed before that visit was due, Diana was much called on by the countryside. The girl restrained her restlessness, and sat at home, receiving everybody with a friendliness which might have been insipid but for its grace and spontaneity. She disliked no one, was bored by no one. The joy of her home-coming seemed to halo them all. Even the sour Miss Bertrams could not annoy her; she thought them sensible and clever; even the tiresome Mrs. Minchin of Minchin Hall, the "gusher" of the county, who "adored" all mankind and ill-treated her step-daughter, even she was dubbed "very kind," till Mrs. Roughsedge, next day, kindled a passion in the girl's eyes by some tales of the step-daughter. Mrs. Colwood wondered whether, indeed, she *could* be bored, as Mrs. Minchin had not achieved it. Those who talk easily and well, like Diana, are less keenly aware, she thought, of the platitudes of their neighbors. They are not defenceless, like the shy and the silent.

Nevertheless, it was clear that if Diana welcomed the neighbors with pleasure she often saw them go with relief. As soon as the house was clear of them, she would stand pensively by the fire, looking down into the blaze like one on whom a dream suddenly descends—then

would often call her dog, and go out alone, into the winter twilight. From these rambles she would return grave—sometimes with reddened eyes. But at all times, as Mrs. Colwood soon began to realize, there was but a thin line of division between her gayety and some inexplicable sadness, some unspoken grief, which seemed to rise upon her and overshadow her, like a cloud tangled in the woods of spring. Mrs. Colwood could only suppose that these times of silence and eclipse were connected in some way with her father and her loss of him. But whenever they occurred, Mrs. Colwood found her own mind invincibly recalled to that name on the box of papers, which still haunted her, still brought with it a vague sense of something painful and harrowing—a breath of desolation, in strange harmony, it often seemed, with certain looks and moods of Diana. But Mrs. Colwood searched her memory in vain. And, indeed, after a little while, some imperious instinct even forbade her the search—so rapid and strong was the growth of sympathy with the young life which had called her to its aid.

The day of the Marsham visit arrived—a January afternoon clear and frosty. In the morning before they were to start, Diana seemed to be often closeted with her maid, and once in passing Miss Mallory's open door, her companion could not help seeing a consultation going on, and a snowy white dress, with black ribbons, lying on the bed. Heretofore Diana had only appeared in black, the strict black which French dressmakers understand, for it was little more than a year since her father's death. The thought of seeing her in white stirred Mrs. Colwood's expectations.

Tallyn Hall was eight miles from Beechcote. The

ladies were to drive, but in order to show Mrs. Colwood something of the country, Diana decreed that they should walk up to the downs by a field path, meeting the carriage which bore their luggage at a convenient point on the main road.

The day was a day of beauty—the trees and grass lightly rimed, the air sparkling and translucent. Nature was held in the rest of winter; but beneath the outward stillness, one caught as it were the strong heart-beat of the mighty mother. Diana climbed the steep down without a pause, save when she turned round from time to time to help her companion. Her slight firm frame, the graceful decision of her movements, the absence of all stress and effort showed a creature accustomed to exercise and open air; Mrs. Colwood, the frail Anglo-Indian to whom walking was a task, tried to rival her in vain; and Diana was soon full of apologies and remorse for having tempted her to the climb.

"Please!—please!"—the little lady panted, as they reached the top—"wasn't this worth it?"

For they stood in one of the famous wood and common lands of Southern England—great beeches towering overhead—glades opening to right and left—ferny paths over green turf-tracks, and avenues of immemorial age, the highways of a vanished life—old earthworks, overgrown—lanes deep-sunk in the chalk where the pack-horses once made their way—gnarled thorns, bent with years, yet still white-mantled in the spring: a wild, enchanted no-man's country, owned it seemed by rabbits and birds, solitary, lovely, and barren—yet from its furthest edge, the high spectator, looking eastward, on a clear night, might see on the horizon the dim flare of London.

Diana's habitual joy broke out, as she stood gazing at the village below, the walls and woods of Beechcote, the church, the plough-lands, and the far-western plain, drawn in pale grays and purples under the declining sun.

"Isn't it heavenly! — the browns — the blues — the soberness, the delicacy of it all? Oh, so much better than any tiresome Mediterranean—any stupid Riviera! —Ah!" She stopped and turned, checked by a sound behind her.

Captain Roughsedge appeared, carrying his gun, his spaniel beside him. He greeted the ladies with what seemed to Mrs. Colwood a very evident start of pleasure, and turned to walk with them.

"You have been shooting?" said Diana.

He admitted it.

"That's what you enjoy?"

He flushed.

"More than anything in the world."

But he looked at his questioner a little askance, as though uncertain how she might take so gross a confession.

Diana laughed, and hoped he got as much as he desired. Then he was not like his father—who cared so much for books?

"Oh, books!" He shrugged his shoulders. "Well, the fact is, I—I don't often read if I can help it. But of course they make you do a lot of it—with these beastly examinations. They've about spoiled the army with them."

"You wouldn't do it for pleasure?"

"What—reading?" He shook his head decidedly. "Not while I could be doing anything else."

"Not history or poetry?"

He looked at her again nervously. But the girl's face was gay, and he ventured on the truth.

"Well, no, I can't say I do. My father reads a deal of poetry aloud."

"And it bores you?"

"Well, I don't understand it," he said, slowly and candidly.

"Don't you even read the papers?" asked Diana, wondering.

He started.

"Why, I should think I do!" he cried. "I should rather think I do! That's another thing altogether—that's not books."

"Then perhaps you read the debate last night?" She looked at him with a kindling eye.

"Of course I did—every word of it! Do you know what those Radical fellows are up to now? They'll never rest until we've lost the Khaibar—and then the Lord only knows what 'll happen."

Diana flew into discussion—quick breath, red cheeks! Mrs. Colwood looked on amazed.

Presently both appealed to her, the Anglo-Indian. But she smiled and stammered—declining the challenge. Beside their eagerness, their passion, she felt herself tongue-tied. Captain Roughsedge had seen two years' service on the Northwest Frontier; Diana had ridden through the Khaibar with her father and a Lieutenant-Governor. In both the sense of England's historic task as the guardian of a teeming India against onslaught from the north, had sunk deep, not into brain merely. Figures of living men, acts of heroism and endurance, the thought of English soldiers ambushed in mountain de-

files, or holding out against Afridi hordes in lonely forts, dying and battling, not for themselves, but that the great mountain barrier might hold against the savagery of the north, and English honor and English power maintain themselves unscathed — these had mingled, in both, with the chivalry and the red blood of youth. The eyes of both had seen; the hearts of both had felt.

And now, in the English House of Commons, there were men who doubted and sneered about these things—who held an Afridi life dearer than an English one—who cared nothing for the historic task, who would let India go to-morrow without a pang!

Misguided recreants! But Mrs. Colwood, looking on, could only feel that had they never played their impish part, the winter afternoon for these two companions of hers would have been infinitely less agreeable.

For certainly denunication and argument became Diana—all the more that she was no "female franzy" who must have all the best of the talk; she listened—she evoked—she drew on, and drew out. Mrs. Colwood was secretly sure that this very modest and ordinarily stupid young man had never talked so well before, that his mother would have been astonished could she have beheld him. What had come to the young women of this generation! Their grandmothers cared for politics only so far as they advanced the fortunes of their lords—otherwise what was Hecuba to them, or they to Hecuba? But these women have minds for the impersonal. Diana was not talking to make an effect on Captain Roughsedge —that was the strange part of it. Hundreds of women can make politics serve the primitive woman's game; the "come hither in the ee" can use that weapon as well

as any other. But here was an intellectual, a patriotic passion, veritable, genuine, not feigned.

Well! — the spectator admitted it — unwillingly — so long as the debater, the orator, were still desirable, still lovely. She stole a glance at Captain Roughsedge. Was he, too, so unconscious of sex, of opportunity? Ah! *that* she doubted! The young man played his part stoutly; flung back the ball without a break; but there were glances, and movements and expressions, which to this shrewd feminine eye appeared to betray what no scrutiny could detect in Diana—a pleasure within a pleasure, and thoughts behind thoughts. At any rate, he prolonged the walk as long as it could be prolonged; he accompanied them to the very door of their carriage, and would have delayed them there but that Diana looked at her watch in dismay.

"You'll hear plenty of that sort of stuff to-night!" he said, as he helped them to their wraps. "'Perish India!' and all the rest of it. All they'll mind at Tallyn will be that the Afridis haven't killed a few more Britishers."

Diana gave him a rather grave smile and bow as the carriage drove on. Mrs. Colwood wondered whether the Captain's last remark had somehow offended her companion. But Miss Mallory made no reference to it. Instead, she began to give her companion some preliminary information as to the party they were likely to find at Tallyn.

As Mrs. Colwood already knew, Mr. Oliver Marsham, member for the Western division of Brookshire, was young and unmarried. He lived with his mother, Lady Lucy Marsham, the owner of Tallyn Hall; and his widowed sister, Mrs. Fotheringham, was also a constant

inmate of the house. Mrs. Fotheringham was if possible more extreme in opinions than her brother, frequented platforms, had quarrelled with all her Conservative relations, including a family of stepsons, and supported Women's Suffrage. It was evident that Diana was steeling herself to some endurance in this quarter. As to the other guests whom they might expect, Diana knew little. She had heard that Mr. Ferrier was to be there—ex-Home Secretary, and now leader of the Opposition—and old Lady Niton. Diana retailed what gossip she knew of this rather famous personage, whom three-fourths of the world found insolent and the rest witty. "They say, anyway, that she can snub Mrs. Fotheringham," said Diana, laughing.

"You met them abroad?"

"Only Mr. Marsham and Lady Lucy. Papa and I were walking over the hills at Portofino. We fell in with him, and he asked us the way to San Fruttuoso. We were going there, so we showed him. Papa liked him, and he came to see us afterwards—several times. Lady Lucy came once."

"She is nice?"

"Oh yes," said Diana, vaguely, "she is quite beautiful for her age. You never saw such lovely hands. And so fastidious—so dainty! I remember feeling uncomfortable all the time, because I knew I had a tear in my dress, and my hair was untidy—and I was certain she noticed."

"It's all rather alarming," said Mrs. Colwood, smiling.

"No, no!"—Diana turned upon her eagerly. "They're very kind—very, very kind!"

The winter day was nearly gone when they reached

their destination. But there was just light enough, as they stepped out of the carriage, to show a large modern building, built of red brick, with many gables and bow-windows, and a generally restless effect. As they followed the butler through the outer hall, a babel of voices made itself heard, and when he threw open the door into the inner hall, they found themselves ushered into a large party.

There was a pleased exclamation from a tall fair man standing near the fire, who came forward at once to meet them.

"So glad to see you! But we hoped for you earlier! Mother, here is Miss Mallory."

Lady Lucy, a woman of sixty, still slender and stately, greeted them kindly, Mrs. Colwood was introduced, and room was made for the new-comers in the circle round the tea-table, which was presided over by a lady with red hair and an eye-glass, who gave a hand to Diana, and a bow, or more precisely a nod, to Mrs. Colwood.

"I'm Oliver's sister—my name's Fotheringham. That's my cousin—Madeleine Varley. Madeleine, find me some cups! This is Mr. Ferrier—Mr. Ferrier, Miss Mallory.—I expect you know Lady Niton.—Sir James Chide, Miss Mallory.—Perhaps that 'll do to begin with!" said Mrs. Fotheringham, carelessly, glancing at a further group of people. "Now I'll give you some tea."

Diana sat down, very shy, and a little flushed. Mr. Marsham hovered about her, inducing her to loosen her furs, bringing her tea, and asking questions about her settlement at Beechcote. He showed also a marked courtesy to Mrs. Colwood, and the little widow, susceptible to every breath of kindness, formed the prompt opinion that he was both handsome and agreeable.

Oliver Marsham, indeed, was not a person to be overlooked. His height was about six foot three; and his long slender limbs and spare frame had earned him, as a lad, among the men of his father's works, the description of "two yards o' pump-waater, straight oop an' down." But in his thin lengthiness there was nothing awkward—rather a graceful readiness and vigor. And the head which surmounted this lightly built body gave to the whole personality the force and weight it might otherwise have missed. The hair was very thick and very fair, though already slightly grizzled. It lay in heavy curly masses across a broad head, defining a strong brow above deeply set small eyes of a pale conspicuous blue. The nose, aquiline and large; the mouth large also, but thin-lipped and flexible; slight hollows in the cheeks, and a long, lantern jaw. The whole figure made an impression of ease, power, and self-confidence.

"So you like your old house?" he said, presently, to Diana, sitting down beside her, and dropping his voice a little.

"It suits me perfectly."

"I am certain the moat is rheumatic! But you will never admit it."

"I would, if it were true," she said, smiling.

"No!—you are much too romantic. You see, I remember our conversations."

"Did I never admit the truth?"

"You would never admit it *was* the truth. And my difficulty was to find an arbiter between us."

Diana's face changed a little. He perceived it instantly.

"Your father was sometimes arbiter," he said, in a

still lower tone—"but naturally he took your side. I shall always rejoice I had that chance of meeting him."

Diana said nothing, but her dark eyes turned on him with a soft friendly look. His own smiled in response, and he resumed:

"I suppose you don't know many of these people here?"

"Not any."

"I'm sure you'll like Mr. Ferrier. He is our very old friend—almost my guardian. Of course—on politics—you won't agree!"

"I didn't expect to agree with anybody here," said Diana, slyly.

He laughed.

"I might offer you Lady Niton—but I refrain. To-morrow I have reason to believe that two Tories are coming to dinner."

"Which am I to admire?—your liberality, or their courage?"

"I have matched them by two socialists. Which will you sit next?"

"Oh, I am proof!" said Diana. "'Come one, come all.'"

He looked at her smilingly.

"Is it always the same? Are you still in love with all the dear old abuses?"

"And do you still hate everything that wasn't made last week?"

"Oh no! We only hate what cheats or oppresses the people."

"The people?" echoed Diana, with an involuntary lift of the eyebrows, and she looked round the immense hall, with its costly furniture, its glaring electric lights,

and the band of bad fresco which ran round its lower walls.

Oliver Marsham reddened a little; then said:

"I see my cousin Miss Drake. May I introduce her? —Alicia!"

A young lady had entered, from a curtained archway dividing the hall from a passage beyond. She paused a moment examining the company. The dark curtain behind her made an effective background for the brilliance of her hair, dress, and complexion, of which fact—such at least was Diana's instant impression—she was most composedly aware. At least she lingered a few leisurely seconds, till everybody in the hall had had the opportunity of marking her entrance. Then beckoned by Oliver Marsham, she moved toward Diana.

"How do you do? I suppose you've had a long drive? Don't you hate driving?"

And without waiting for an answer, she turned affectedly away, and took a place at the tea-table where room had been made for her by two young men. Reaching out a white hand, she chose a cake, and began to nibble it slowly, her elbows resting on the table, the ruffles of white lace falling back from her bare and rounded arms. Her look meanwhile, half absent, half audacious, seemed to wander round the persons near, as though she saw them, without taking any real account of them.

"What have you been doing, Alicia, all this time?" said Marsham, as he handed her a cup of tea.

"Dressing."

An incredulous shout from the table.

"Since lunch!"

Miss Drake nodded. Lady Lucy put in an explana-

tory remark about a "dressmaker from town," but was not heard. The table was engaged in watching the newcomer.

"May we congratulate you on the result?" said Mr. Ferrier, putting up his eye-glass.

"If you like," said Miss Drake, indifferently, still gently munching at her cake. Then suddenly she smiled —a glittering infectious smile, to which unconsciously all the faces near her responded. "I have been reading the book you lent me!" she said, addressing Mr. Ferrier.

"Well?"

"I'm too stupid—I can't understand it."

Mr. Ferrier laughed.

"I'm afraid that excuse won't do, Miss Alicia. You must find another."

She was silent a moment, finished her cake, then took some grapes, and began to play with them in the same conscious provocative way—till at last she turned upon her immediate neighbor, a young barrister with a broad boyish face.

"Well, I wonder whether *you'd* mind?"

"Mind what?"

"If your father had done something shocking—forged —or murdered—or done something of that kind—supposing, of course, he were dead."

"Do you mean—if I suddenly found out?"

She nodded assent.

"Well!" he reflected; "it would be disagreeable!"

"Yes—but would it make you give up all the things you like?—golfing—and cards—and parties—and the girl you were engaged to—and take to slumming, and that kind of thing?"

The slight inflection of the last words drew smiles. Mr. Ferrier held up a finger.

"Miss Alicia, I shall lend you no more books."

"Why? Because I can't appreciate them?"

Mr. Ferrier laughed.

"I maintain that book is a book to melt the heart of a stone."

"Well, I tried to cry," said the girl, putting another grape into her mouth, and quietly nodding at her interlocutor—"I did—honor bright. But—really—what does it matter what your father did?"

"My *dear!*" said Lady Lucy, softly. Her singularly white and finely wrinkled face, framed in a delicate capote of old lace, looked coldly at the speaker.

"By-the-way," said Mr. Ferrier, "does not the question rather concern you in this neighborhood? I hear young Brenner has just come to live at West Hill. I don't now what sort of a youth he is, but if he's a decent fellow, I don't imagine anybody will boycott him on account of his father's misdoings."

He referred to one of the worst financial scandals of the preceding generation. Lady Lucy made no answer, but any one closely observing her might have noticed a sudden and sharp stiffening of the lips, which was in truth her reply.

"Oh, you can always ask a man like that to garden-parties!" said a shrill, distant voice. The group round the table turned. The remark was made by old Lady Niton, who sat enthroned in an arm-chair near the fire, sometimes knitting, and sometimes observing her neighbors with a malicious eye.

"Anything's good enough, isn't it, for garden-parties?" said Mrs. Fotheringham, with a little sneer.

Lady Niton's face kindled. "Let us be Radicals, my dear," she said, briskly, "but not hypocrites. Garden-parties are invaluable—for people you can't ask into the house. By-the-way, wasn't it you, Oliver, who scolded me last night, because I said somebody wasn't 'in Society'?"

"You said it of a particular hero of mine," laughed Marsham. "I naturally pitied Society."

"What is Society? Where is it?" said Sir James Chide, contemptuously. "I suppose Lady Palmerston knew."

The famous lawyer sat a little apart from the rest. Diana, who had only caught his name, and knew nothing else of him, looked with sudden interest at the man's great brow and haughty look. Lady Niton shook her head emphatically.

"We know quite as well as she did. Society is just as strong and just as exclusive as it ever was. But it is clever enough now to hide the fact from outsiders."

"I am afraid we must agree that standards have been much relaxed," said Lady Lucy.

"Not at all—not at all!" cried Lady Niton. "There were black sheep then; and there are black sheep now."

Lady Lucy held her own.

"I am sure that people take less care in their invitations," she said, with soft obstinacy. "I have often heard my mother speak of society in her young days, —how the dear Queen's example purified it—and how much less people bowed down to money then than now."

"Ah, that was before the Americans and the Jews," said Sir James Chide.

"People forget their responsibility," said Lady Lucy, turning to Diana, and speaking so as not to be heard by

the whole table. "In old days it was birth; but now—now when we are all democratic—it should be *character*. —Don't you agree with me?"

"Other people's character?" asked Diana.

"Oh, we mustn't be unkind, of course. But when a thing is notorious. Take this young Brenner. His father's frauds ruined hundreds of poor people. How can I receive him here, as if nothing had happened? It ought not to be forgotten. He himself ought to *wish* to live quietly!"

Diana gave a hesitating assent, adding: "But I'm sorry for Mr. Brenner!"

Mr. Ferrier, as she spoke, leaned slightly across the tea-table as though to listen to what she said. Lady Lucy moved away, and Mr. Ferrier, after spending a moment of quiet scrutiny on the young mistress of Beechcote, came to sit beside her.

Mrs. Fotheringham threw herself back in her chair with a little yawn. "Mamma is more difficult than the Almighty!" she said, in a loud aside to Sir James Chide. "One sin—or even somebody else's sin—and you are done for."

Sir James, who was a Catholic, and scrupulous in speech, pursed his lips slightly, drummed on the table with his fingers, and finally rose without reply, and betook himself to the *Times*. Miss Drake meanwhile had been carried off to play billiards at the farther end of the hall by the young men of the party. It might have been noticed that, before she went, she had spent a few minutes of close though masked observation of her cousin Oliver's new friend. Also, that she tried to carry Oliver Marsham with her, but unsuccessfully. He had returned to Diana's neighborhood, and stood leaning

over a chair beside her, listening to her conversation with Mr. Ferrier.

His sister, Mrs. Fotheringham, was not content to listen. Diana's impressions of the country-side, which presently caught her ear, evidently roused her pugnacity. She threw herself on all the girl's rose-colored appreciations with a scorn hardly disguised. All the "locals," according to her, were stupid or snobbish—bores, in fact, of the first water. And to Diana's discomfort and amazement, Oliver Marsham joined in. He showed himself possessed of a sharper and more caustic tongue than Diana had yet suspected. His sister's sallies only amused him, and sometimes he improved on them, with epithets or comments, shrewder than hers indeed, but quite as biting.

"His neighbors and constituents!" thought Diana, in a young astonishment. "The people who send him to Parliament!"

Mr. Ferrier seemed to become aware of her surprise and disapproval, for he once or twice threw in a satirical word or two, at the expense, not of the criticised, but of the critics. The well-known Leader of the Opposition was a stout man of middle height, with a round head and face, at first sight wholly undistinguished, an ample figure, and smooth, straight hair. But there was so much honesty and acuteness in the eyes, so much humor in the mouth, and so much kindness in the general aspect, that Diana felt herself at once attracted; and when the master of the house was summoned by his head gamekeeper to give directions for the shooting-party of the following day, and Mrs. Fotheringham had gone off to attend what seemed to be a vast correspondence, the politician and the young girl fell into a con-

versation which soon became agreeable and even absorbing to both. Mrs. Colwood, sitting on the other side of the hall, timidly discussing fancy work with the Miss Varleys, Lady Lucy's young nieces, saw that Diana was making a conquest; and it seemed to her, moreover, that Mr. Ferrier's scrutiny of his companion was somewhat more attentive and more close than was quite explained by the mere casual encounter of a man of middle-age with a young and charming girl. Was he—like herself—aware that matters of moment might be here at their beginning?

Meanwhile, if Mr. Ferrier was making discoveries, so was Diana. A man, it appeared, could be not only one of the busiest and most powerful politicians in England, but also a philosopher, and a reader, one whose secret tastes were as unworldly and romantic as her own. Books, music, art—he could handle these subjects no less skilfully than others political or personal. And, throughout, his deference to a young and pretty woman was never at fault. Diana was encouraged to talk, and then, without a word of flattery, given to understand that her talk pleased. Under this stimulus, her soft dark beauty was soon glowing at its best; innocence, intelligence, and youth, spread as it were their tendrils to the sun.

Meanwhile, Sir James Chide, a few yards off, was apparently absorbed partly in the *Times*, partly in the endeavor to make Lady Lucy's fox terrier go through its tricks.

Once Mr. Ferrier drew Diana's attention to her neighbor.

"You know him?"

"I never saw him before."

"You know who he is?"

"Ought I?—I am so sorry!"

"He is perhaps the greatest criminal advocate we have. And a very distinguished politician too.—Whenever our party comes in, he will be in the Cabinet.—You must make him talk this evening."

"I?" said Diana, laughing and blushing.

"You can!" smiled Mr. Ferrier. "Witness how you have been making me chatter! But I think I read you right? You do not mind if one chatters?—if one gives you information?"

"Mind!—How could I be anything but grateful? It puzzles me so—this—" she hesitated.

"This English life? — especially the political life? Well!—let me be your guide. I have been in it for a long while."

Diana thanked him, and rose.

"You want your room?" he asked her, kindly.—"Mrs. Fotheringham, I think, is in the drawing-room. Let me take you to her. But, first, look at two or three of these pictures as you go."

"These—pictures?" faltered Diana, looking round her, her tone changing.

"Oh, not those horrible frescos! Those were perpetrated by Marsham's father. They represent, as you see, the different processes of the Iron Trade. Old Henry Marsham liked them, because, as he said, they explained him, and the house. Oliver would like to whitewash them—but for filial piety. People might suppose him ashamed of his origin. No, no!—I mean those two or three old pictures at the end of the room. Come and look at them—they are on our way."

He led her to inspect them. They proved to be two Gainsboroughs and a Raeburn, representing ancestors on

Lady Lucy's side. Mr. Ferrier's talk of them showed his intimate knowledge both of Varleys and Marshams, the knowledge rather of a kinsman than a friend. Diana perceived, indeed, how great must be the affection, the intimacy, between him and them.

Meanwhile, as the man of fifty and the slender girl in black passed before him, on their way to examine the pictures, Sir James Chide, casually looking up, was apparently struck by some rapid and powerful impression. It arrested the hand playing with the dog; it held and transformed the whole man. His eyes, open as though in astonishment or pain, followed every movement of Diana, scrutinized every look and gesture. His face had flushed slightly—his lips were parted. He had the aspect of one trying eagerly, passionately, to follow up some clew that would not unwind itself; and every now and then he bent forward—listening—trying to catch her voice.

Presently the inspection was over. Diana turned and beckoned to Mrs. Colwood. The two ladies went toward the drawing-room, Mr. Ferrier showing the way.

When he returned to the hall, Sir James Chide, its sole occupant, was walking up and down.

"Who was that young lady?" said Sir James, turning abruptly.

"Isn't she charming? Her name is Mallory—and she has just settled at Beechcote, near here. That small fair lady was her companion. Oliver tells me she is an orphan—well off—with no kith or kin. She has just come to England, it seems, for the first time. Her father brought her up abroad away from everybody. She will have a success! But of all the little Jingoes!"

Mr. Ferrier's face expressed an amused recollection of some of Diana's speeches.

"Mallory?" said Sir James, under his breath—"*Mallory?*" He walked to the window, and stood looking out, his hands in his pockets.

Mr. Ferrier went up-stairs to write letters. In a few minutes the man at the window came slowly back toward the fire, staring at the ground.

"The look in the eyes!" he said to himself—"the mouth!—the voice!"

He stood by the vast and pompous fireplace—hanging over the blaze—the prey of some profound agitation, some flooding onset of memory. Servants passed and repassed through the hall; sounds loud and merry came from the drawing-room. Sir James neither saw nor heard.

CHAPTER III

ALICIA DRAKE—a vision of pale pink—had just appeared in the long gallery at Tallyn, on her way to dinner. Her dress, her jewels, and all her minor appointments were of that quality and perfection to which only much thought and plentiful money can attain. She had not, in fact, been romancing in that account of her afternoon which has been already quoted. Dress was her weapon and her stock in trade; it was, she said, necessary to her "career." And on this plea she steadily exacted in its support a proportion of the family income which left but small pickings for the schooling of her younger brothers and the allowances of her two younger sisters. But so great were the indulgence and the pride of her parents—small Devonshire land-owners living on an impoverished estate—that Alicia's demands were conceded without a murmur. They themselves were insignificant folk, who had, in their own opinion, failed in life; and most of their children seemed to them to possess the same ineffective qualities—or the same absence of qualities—as themselves. But Alicia represented their one chance of something brilliant and interesting, something to lift them above their neighbors and break up the monotony of their later lives. Their devotion was a strange mixture of love and selfishness; at any rate, Alicia could always feel, and did always feel, that she was playing her family's game as well as her own.

Her own game, of course, came first. She was not a beauty, in the sense in which Diana Mallory was a beauty; and of that fact she had been perfectly aware after her first apparently careless glance at the newcomer of the afternoon. But she had points that never failed to attract notice: a free and rather insolent carriage, audaciously beautiful eyes, a general roundness and softness, and a grace—unfailing, deliberate, and provocative, even in actions, morally, the most graceless—that would have alone secured her the "career" on which she was bent.

Of her mental qualities, one of the most profitable was a very shrewd power of observation. As she swept slowly along the corridor, which overlooked the hall at Tallyn, none of the details of the house were lost upon her. Tallyn was vast, ugly—above all, rich. Henry Marsham, the deceased husband of Lady Lucy and father of Oliver and Mrs. Fotheringham, had made an enormous fortune in the Iron Trade of the north, retiring at sixty that he might enjoy some of those pleasures of life for which business had left him too little time. One of these pleasures was building. Henry Marsham had spent ten years in building Tallyn, and at the end of that time, feeling it impossible to live in the huge incoherent place he had created, he hired a small villa at Nice and went to die there in privacy and peace. Nevertheless, his will laid strict injunctions upon his widow to inhabit and keep up Tallyn; injunctions backed by considerable sanctions of a financial kind. His will, indeed, had been altogether a document of some eccentricity; though as eight years had now elapsed since his death, the knowledge of its provisions possessed by outsiders had had time to grow vague. Still, there were strong

general impressions abroad, and as Alicia Drake surveyed the house which the old man had built to be the incubus of his descendants, some of them teased her mind. It was said, for instance, that Oliver Marsham and his sister only possessed pittances of about a thousand a year apiece, while Tallyn, together with the vast bulk of Henry Marsham's fortune, had been willed to Lady Lucy, and lay, moreover, at her absolute disposal. Was this so, or no? Miss Drake's curiosity, for some time past, would have been glad to be informed.

Meanwhile, here was the house—about which there was no mystery—least of all, as to its cost. Interminable broad corridors, carpeted with ugly Brussels and suggesting a railway hotel, branched out before Miss Drake's eyes in various directions; upon them opened not bedrooms but "suites," as Mr. Marsham père had loved to call them, of which the number was legion, while the bachelors' wing alone would have lodged a regiment. Every bedroom was like every other, except for such variations as Tottenham Court Road, rioting at will, could suggest. Copies in marble or bronze of well-known statues ranged along the corridors — a forlorn troupe of nude and shivering divinities. The immense hall below, with its violent frescos and its brand-new Turkey carpets, was panelled in oak, from which some device of stain or varnish had managed to abstract every particle of charm. A whole oak wood, indeed, had been lavished on the swathing and sheathing of the house, with the only result that the spectator beheld it steeped in a repellent yellow-brown from top to toe, against which no ornament, no piece of china, no picture, even did they possess some individual beauty, could possibly make it prevail.

And the drawing-room! As Alicia Drake advanced alone into its empty and blazing magnificence she could only laugh in its face—so eager and restless was the effort which it made, and so hopeless the defeat. Enormous mirrors, spread on white and gold walls; large copies from Italian pictures, collected by Henry Marsham in Rome; more facile statues holding innumerable lights; great pieces of modern china painted with realistic roses and poppies; crimson carpets, gilt furniture, and flaring cabinets—Miss Drake frowned as she looked at it. "What *could* be done with it?" she said to herself, walking slowly up and down, and glancing from side to side—"What *could* be done with it?"

A rustle in the hall announced another guest. Mrs. Fotheringham entered. Marsham's sister dressed with severity; and as she approached her cousin she put up her eye-glass for what was evidently a hostile inspection of the dazzling effect presented by the young lady. But Alicia was not afraid of Mrs. Fotheringham.

"How early we are!" she said, still quietly looking at the reflection of herself in the mirror over the mantelpiece and warming a slender foot at the fire. "Haven't some more people arrived, Cousin Isabel? I thought I heard a carriage while I was dressing."

"Yes; Miss Vincent and three men came by the late train."

"All Labor members?" asked Alicia, with a laugh.

Mrs. Fotheringham explained, with some tartness, that only one of the three was a Labor member—Mr. Barton. Of the other two, one was Edgar Frobisher, the other Mr. McEwart, a Liberal M.P., who had just won a hotly contested bye-election. At the name of Edgar Frobisher, Miss Drake's countenance showed some ani-

mation. She inquired if he had been doing anything madder than usual. Mrs. Fotheringham replied, without enthusiasm, that she knew nothing about his recent doings—nor about Mr. McEwart, who was said, however, to be of the right stuff. Mr. Barton, on the other hand, "is a *great* friend of mine—and a most remarkable man. Oliver has been very lucky to get him."

Alicia inquired whether he was likely to appear in dress clothes.

"Certainly not. He never does anything out of keeping with his class—and he knows that we lay no stress on that kind of thing." This, with another glance at the elegant Paris frock which adorned the person of Alicia—a frock, in Mrs. Fotheringham's opinion, far too expensive for the girl's circumstances. Alicia received the glance without flinching. It was one of her good points that she was never meek with the people who disliked her. She merely threw out another inquiry as to "Miss Vincent."

"One of mamma's acquaintances. She was a private secretary to some one mamma knows, and she is going to do some work for Oliver when the session begins.

"Didn't Oliver tell me she is a Socialist?"

Mrs. Fotheringham believed it might be said.

"How Miss Mallory will enjoy herself!" said Alicia, with a little laugh.

"Have you been talking to Oliver about her?" Mrs. Fotheringham stared rather hard at her cousin.

"Of course. Oliver likes her."

"Oliver likes a good many people."

"Oh no, Cousin Isabel! Oliver likes very few people—very, very few," said Miss Drake, decidedly, looking down into the fire.

"I don't know why you give Oliver such an unamiable character! In my opinion, he is often not so much on his guard as I should like to see him."

"Oh, well, we can't all be as critical as you, dear Cousin Isabel! But, anyway, Oliver admires Miss Mallory extremely. We can all see that."

The girl turned a steady face on her companion. Mrs. Fotheringham was conscious of a certain secret admiration. But her own point of view had nothing to do with Miss Drake's.

"It amuses him to talk to her," she said, sharply; "I am sure I hope it won't come to anything more. It would be very unsuitable."

"Why? Politics? Oh! that doesn't matter a bit."

"I beg your pardon. Oliver is becoming an important man, and it will never do for him to hamper himself with a wife who cannot sympathize with any of his enthusiasms and ideals."

Miss Drake shrugged her shoulders.

"He would convert her—and he likes triumphing. Oh! Cousin Isabel!—look at that lamp!"

An oil lamp in an inner drawing-room, placed to illuminate an easel portrait of Lady Lucy, was smoking atrociously. The two ladies flew toward it, and were soon lost to sight and hearing amid a labyrinth of furniture and palms.

The place they left vacant was almost immediately filled by Oliver Marsham himself, who came in studying a pencilled paper, containing the names of the guests. He and his mother had not found the dinner very easy to arrange. Upon his heels followed Mr. Ferrier, who hurried to the fire, rubbing his hands and complaining of the cold.

"I never felt this house cold before. Has anything happened to your *calorifère?* These rooms are too big! By-the-way, Oliver"—Mr. Ferrier turned his back to the blaze, and looked round him—"when are you going to reform this one?"

Oliver surveyed it.

"Of course I should like nothing better than to make a bonfire of it all! But mother—"

"Of course—of course! Ah, well, perhaps when you marry, my dear boy! Another reason for making haste!"

The older man turned a laughing eye on his companion. Marsham merely smiled, a little vaguely, without reply. Ferrier observed him, then began abstractedly to study the carpet. After a moment he looked up—

"I like your little friend, Oliver—I like her particularly!"

"Miss Mallory? Yes, I saw you had been making acquaintance. Well?"

His voice affected a light indifference, but hardly succeeded.

"A very attractive personality!—fresh and womanly—no nonsense—heart enough for a dozen. But all the same the intellect is hungry, and wants feeding. No one will ever succeed with her, Oliver, who forgets she has a brain. Ah! here she is!"

For the door had been thrown open, and Diana entered, followed by Mrs. Colwood. She came in slowly, her brow slightly knit, and her black eyes touched with the intent seeking look which was natural to them. Her dress of the freshest simplest white fell about her in plain folds. It made the same young impression as the childish curls on the brow and temples, and both men watched her with delight. Marsham went to meet her.

"Will you sit on my left? I must take in Lady Niton."

Diana smiled and nodded.

"And who is to be my fate?"

"Mr. Edgar Frobisher. You will quarrel with him—and like him!"

"One of the 'Socialists'?"

"Ah—you must find out!"

He threw her a laughing backward glance as he went off to give directions to some of his other guests. The room filled up. Diana was aware of a tall young man, fair-haired, and evidently Scotch, whom she had not seen before, and then of a girl, whose appearance and dress riveted her attention. She was thin and small—handsome, but for a certain strained emaciated air, a lack of complexion and of bloom. But her blue eyes, black-lashed and black-browed, were superb; they made indeed the note, the distinction of the whole figure. The thick hair, cut short in the neck, was brushed back and held by a blue ribbon, the only trace of ornament in a singular costume, which consisted of a very simple morning dress, of some woollen material, nearly black, garnished at the throat and wrists by some plain white frills. The dress hung loosely on the girl's starved frame, the hands were long and thin, the face sallow. Yet such was the force of the eyes, the energy of the strong chin and mouth, the flashing freedom of her smile, as she stood talking to Lady Lucy, that all the ugly plainness of the dress seemed to Diana, as she watched her, merely to increase her strange effectiveness, to mark her out the more favorably from the glittering room, from Lady Lucy's satin and diamonds, or the shimmering elegance of Alicia Drake.

As she bowed to Mr. Frobisher, and took his arm amid

the pairs moving toward the dining-room, Diana asked him eagerly who the lady in the dark dress might be.

"Oh! a great friend of mine," he said, pleasantly. "Isn't she splendid? Did you notice her evening dress?"

"Is it an evening dress?"

"It's *her* evening dress. She possesses two costumes —both made of the same stuff, only the morning one has a straight collar, and the evening one has frills."

"She doesn't think it right to dress like other people?"

"Well—she has very little money, and what she has she can't afford to spend on dress. No—I suppose she doesn't think it right."

By this time they were settled at table, and Diana, convinced that she had found one of the two Socialists promised her, looked round for the other. Ah! there he was, beside Mrs. Fotheringham—who was talking to him with an eagerness rarely vouchsafed to her acquaintances. A powerful, short-necked man, in the black Sunday coat of the workman, with sandy hair, blunt features, and a furrowed brow—he had none of the magnetism, the strange refinement of the lady in the frills. Diana drew a long breath.

"How odd it all is!" she said, as though to herself.

Her companion looked at her with amusement.

"What is odd? The combination of this house—with Barton—and Miss Vincent?"

"Why do they consent to come here?" she asked, wondering. "I suppose they despise the rich."

"Not at all! The poor things—the rich—can't help themselves—just yet. *We* come here—because we mean to use the rich."

"You!—you too?"

"A Fabian—" he said, smiling. "Which means that I am not in such a hurry as Barton."

"To ruin your country? You would only murder her by degrees?"—flashed Diana.

"Ah!—you throw down the glove?—so soon? Shall we postpone it for a course or two? I am no use till I have fed."

Diana laughed. They fell into a gossip about their neighbors. The plain young man, with a shock of fair hair, a merry eye, a short chin, and the spirits of a school-boy, sitting on Lady Niton's left, was, it seemed, the particular pet and protégé of that masterful old lady. Diana remembered to have seen him at tea-time in Miss Drake's train. Lady Niton, she was told, disliked her own sons, but was never tired of befriending two or three young men who took her fancy. Bobbie Forbes was a constant frequenter of her house on Campden Hill. "But he is no toady. He tells her a number of plain truths—and amuses her guests. In return she provides him with what she calls 'the best society'—and pushes his interests in season and out of season. He is in the Foreign Office, and she is at present manœuvring to get him attached to the Special Mission which is going out to Constantinople."

Diana glanced across the table, and in doing so met the eyes of Mr. Bobbie Forbes, which laughed into hers —involuntarily—as much as to say—"You see my plight?—ridiculous, isn't it?"

For Lady Niton was keeping a greedy conversational hold on both Marsham and the young man, pouncing to right or left, as either showed a disposition to escape from it—so that Forbes was violently withheld from

Alicia Drake, his rightful lady, and Marsham could engage in no consecutive conversation with Diana.

"No escape for you!" smiled Mr. Frobisher, presently, observing the position. "Lady Niton always devastates a dinner-party."

Diana protested that she was quite content. Might she assume, after the fourth course, that his hunger was at least scotched and conversation thrown open?

"I am fortified — thank you. Shall we go back to where we left off? You had just accused me of ruining the country?"

"By easy stages," said Diana. "Wasn't that where we had come to? But first—tell me, because it's all so puzzling!—do you and Mr. Marsham agree?"

"A good deal. But he thinks *he* can use *us*—which is his mistake."

"And Mr. Ferrier?"

Mr. Frobisher shook his head good-humoredly.

"No, no!—Ferrier is a Whig—the Whig of to-day, *bien entendu*, who is a very different person from the Whig of yesterday—still, a Whig, an individualist, a moderate man. He leads the Liberal party—and it is changing all the time under his hand into something he dreads and detests. The party can't do without him now—but—"

He paused, smiling.

"It will shed him some day?"

"It must!"

"And where will Mr. Marsham be then?"

"On the winning side—I think."

The tone was innocent and careless; but the words offended her.

She drew herself up a little.

"He would never betray his friends!"

"Certainly not," said Mr. Frobisher, hastily; "I didn't mean that. But Marsham has a mind more open, more elastic, more modern than Ferrier—great man as he is."

Diana was silent. She seemed still to hear some of the phrases and inflections of Mr. Ferrier's talk of the afternoon. Mr. Frobisher's prophecy wounded some new-born sympathy in her. She turned the conversation.

With Oliver Marsham she talked when she could, as Lady Niton allowed her. She succeeded, at least, in learning something more of her right-hand neighbor and of Miss Vincent. Mr. Frobisher, it appeared, was a Fellow of Magdalen, and was at present lodging in Limehouse, near the docks, studying poverty and Trade-unionism, and living upon a pound a week. As for Miss Vincent, in her capacity of secretary to a well-known Radical member of Parliament, she had been employed, for his benefit, in gathering information first-hand, very often in the same fields where Mr. Frobisher was at work. This brought them often together—and they were the best of comrades, and allies.

Diana's eyes betrayed her curiosity; she seemed to be asking for clews in a strange world. Marsham apparently felt that nothing could be more agreeable than to guide her. He began to describe for her the life of such a woman of the people as Marion Vincent. An orphan at fourteen, earning her own living from the first; self-dependent, self-protected; the friend, on perfectly equal terms, of a group of able men, interested in the same social ideals as herself; living alone, in contempt of all

ordinary conventions, now in Kensington or Belgravia, and now in a back street of Stepney, or Poplar, and equally at home and her own mistress in both; exacting from a rich employer the full market value of the services she rendered him, and refusing to accept the smallest gift or favor beyond; a convinced Socialist and champion of the poor, who had within the past twelve months, to Marsham's knowledge, refused an offer of marriage from a man of large income, passionately devoted to her, whom she liked—mainly, it was believed, because his wealth was based on sweated labor: such was the character sketched by Marsham for his neighbor in the intermittent conversation, which was all that Lady Niton allowed him.

Diana listened silently, but inwardly her mind was full of critical reactions. Was this what Mr. Marsham most admired, his ideal of what a woman should be? Was he exalting, exaggerating it a little, by way of antithesis to those old-fashioned surroundings, that unreal atmosphere, as he would call it, in which, for instance, he had found her—Diana—at Rapallo—under her father's influence and bringing up? The notion spurred her pride as well as her loyalty to her father. She began to hold herself rather stiffly, to throw in a critical remark or two, to be a little flippant even, at Miss Vincent's expense. Homage so warm laid at the feet of one ideal was—she felt it—a disparagement of others; she stood for those others; and presently Marsham began to realize a hurtling of shafts in the air, an incipient battle between them.

He accepted it with delight. Still the same poetical, combative, impulsive creature, with the deep soft voice! She pleased his senses; she stirred his mind; and he

would have thrown himself into one of the old Rapallo arguments with her then and there but for the gad-fly at his elbow.

Immediately after dinner Lady Niton possessed herself of Diana. "Come here, please, Miss Mallory! I wish to make your acquaintance." Thus commanded, the laughing but rebellious Diana allowed herself to be led to a corner of the over-illuminated drawing-room.

"Well!"—said Lady Niton, observing her—"so you have come to settle in these parts?"

Diana assented.

"What made you choose Brookshire?" The question was enforced by a pair of needle-sharp eyes. "There isn't a person worth talking to within a radius of twenty miles."

Diana declined to agree with her; whereupon Lady Niton impatiently exclaimed: "Tut—tut! One might as well milk he-goats as talk to the people here. Nothing to be got out of any of them. Do you like conversation?"

"Immensely!"

"Hum!—But mind you don't talk too much. Oliver talks a great deal more than is good for him. So you met Oliver in Italy? What do you think of him?"

Diana, keeping a grip on laughter, said something civil.

"Oh, Oliver's clever enough—and *ambitious!*" Lady Niton threw up her hands. "But I'll tell you what stands in his way. He says too sharp things of people. Do you notice that?"

"He is very critical," said Diana, evasively.

"Oh, Lord, much worse than that!" said Lady Niton,

coolly. "He makes himself very unpopular. You should tell him so."

"That would be hardly my place," said Diana, flushing a little.

Lady Niton stared at her a moment rather hard—then said: "But he's honey and balm itself compared to Isabel! The Marshams are old friends of mine, but I don't pretend to like Isabel Fotheringham at all. She calls herself a Radical, and there's no one insists more upon their birth and their advantages than she. Don't let her bully you—come to me if she does—I'll protect you."

Diana said vaguely that Mrs. Fotheringham had been very kind.

"You haven't had time to find out," said Lady Niton, grimly. She leaned back fanning herself, her queer white face and small black eyes alive with malice. "Did you ever see such a crew as we were at dinner? I reminded Oliver of the rhyme—'The animals went in two by two.'—It's always the way here. There's no *society* in this house, because you can't take anything or any one for granted. One must always begin from the beginning. What can I have in common with that man Barton? The last time I talked to him, he thought Lord Grey—the Reform Bill Lord Grey—was a Tory—and had never heard of Louis Philippe. He knows nothing that *we* know—and what do I care about his Socialist stuff?—Well, now—Alicia"—her tone changed—"do you admire Alicia?"

Diana, in discomfort, glanced through the archway, leading to the inner drawing-room, which framed the sparkling figure of Miss Drake—and murmured a complimentary remark.

"No!"—said Lady Niton, with emphasis; "no—she's not handsome—though she makes people believe she is. You'll see—in five years. Of course the stupid men admire her, and she plays her cards very cleverly; but—my dear!"—suddenly the formidable old woman bent forward, and tapped Diana's arm with her fan—"let me give you a word of advice. Don't be too innocent here—or too amiable. Don't give yourself away—especially to Alicia!"

Diana had the disagreeable feeling of being looked through and through, physically and mentally; though at the same time she was only very vaguely conscious as to what there might be either for Lady Niton or Miss Drake to see.

"Thank you very much," she said, trying to laugh it off. "It is very kind of you to warn me—but really I don't think you need." She looked round her waveringly.

"May I introduce you to my friend? Mrs. Colwood—Lady Niton." For her glance of appeal had brought Mrs. Colwood to her aid, and between them they coped with this *enfant terrible* among dowagers till the gentlemen came in.

"Here is Sir James Childe," said Lady Niton, rising. "He wants to talk to you, and he don't like me. So I'll go."

Sir James, not without a sly smile, discharged arrow-like at the retreating enemy, took the seat she had vacated.

"This is your first visit to Tallyn, Miss Mallory?"

The voice speaking was the *voix d'or* familiar to Englishmen in many a famous case, capable of any note, any inflection, to which sarcasm or wrath, shrewdness or

pathos, might desire to tune it. In this case it was gentleness itself; and so was the countenance he turned upon Diana. Yet it was a countenance built rather for the sterner than the milder uses of life. A natural majesty expressed itself in the domed forehead, and in the fine head, lightly touched with gray; the eyes too were gray, the lips prominent and sensitive, the face long, and, in line, finely regular. A face of feeling and of power; the face of a Celt, disciplined by the stress and conflict of a non-Celtic world. Diana's young sympathies sprang to meet it, and they were soon in easy conversation.

Sir James questioned her kindly, but discreetly. This was really her first visit to Brookshire?

"To England!" said Diana; and then, on a little wooing, came out the girl's first impressions, natural, enthusiastic, gay. Sir James listened, with eyes half-closed, following every movement of her lips, every gesture of head and hand.

"Your parents took you abroad quite as a child?"

"I went with my father. My mother died when I was quite small."

Sir James did not speak for a moment. At last he said:

"But before you went abroad, you lived in London?"

"Yes—in Kensington Square."

Sir James made a sudden movement which displaced a book on a little table beside him. He stooped to pick it up.

"And your father was tired of England?"

Diana hesitated—

"I—I think he had gone through great trouble. He never got over mamma's death."

"Oh yes, I see," said Sir James, gently. Then, in another tone:

"So you settled on that beautiful coast? I wonder if that was the winter I first saw Italy?"

He named the year.

"Yes—that was the year," said Diana. "Had you never seen Italy before that?" She looked at him in a little surprise.

"Do I seem to you so old?" said Sir James, smiling. "I had been a very busy man, Miss Mallory, and my holidays had been generally spent in Ireland. But that year"—he paused a moment—"that year I had been ill, and the doctors sent me abroad—in October," he added, slowly and precisely. "I went first to Paris, and I was at Genoa in November."

"We must have been there—just about then! Mamma died in October. And I remember the winter was just beginning at Genoa—it was very cold—and I got bronchitis—I was only a little thing."

"And Oliver tells me you found a home at Portofino?"

Diana replied. He kept her talking; yet her impression was that he did not listen very much to what she said. At the same time she felt herself *studied*, in a way which made her self-conscious, which perhaps she might have resented in any man less polished and less courteous.

"Pardon me—" he said, abruptly, at a pause in the conversation. "Your name interests me particularly. It is Welsh, is it not? I knew two or three persons of that name; and they were Welsh."

Diana's look changed a little.

"Yes, it is Welsh," she said, in a hesitating, reserved voice; and then looked round her as though in search of a change of topic.

Sir James bent forward.

"May I come and see you some day at Beechcote?"

Diana flushed with surprise and pleasure.

"Oh! I should be so honored!"

"The honor would be mine," he said, with pleasant deference. "Now I think I see that Marsham is wroth with me for monopolizing you like this."

He rose and walked away, just as Marsham brought up Mr. Barton to introduce him to Diana.

Sir James wandered on into a small drawing-room at the end of the long suite of rooms; in its seclusion he turned back to look at the group he had left behind. His face, always delicately pale, had grown strained and white.

"Is it *possible*"—he said to himself—"that she knows nothing?—that that man was able to keep it all from her?"

He walked up and down a little by himself—pondering—the prey of the same emotion as had seized him in the afternoon; till at last his ear was caught by some hubbub, some agitation in the big drawing-room, especially by the sound of the girlish voice he had just been listening to, only speaking this time in quite another key. He returned to see what was the matter.

He found Miss Mallory the centre of a circle of spectators and listeners, engaged apparently in a three-cornered and very hot discussion with Mr. Barton, the Socialist member, and Oliver Marsham. Diana had entirely forgotten herself, her shyness, the strange house, and all her alarms. If Lady Niton took nothing for granted at Tallyn, that was not, it seemed, the case with John Barton. He, on the contrary, took it for granted

that everybody there was at least a good Radical, and as stoutly opposed as himself to the "wild-cat" and "Jingo" policy of the Government on the Indian frontier, where one of our perennial little wars was then proceeding. News had arrived that afternoon of an indecisive engagement, in which the lives of three English officers and some fifty men of a Sikh regiment had been lost. Mr. Barton, in taking up the evening paper, lying beside Diana, which contained the news, had made very much the remark foretold by Captain Roughsedge in the afternoon. It was, he thought, a pity the repulse had not been more decisive—so as to show all the world into what a hornet's nest the Government was going—"and a hornet's nest which will cost us half a million to take before we've done."

Diana's cheeks flamed. Did Mr. Barton mean to regret that no more English lives had been lost?

Mr. Barton was of opinion that if the defeat had been a bit worse, bloodshed might have been saved in the end. A Jingo Viceroy and a Jingo press could only be stopped by disaster—

On the contrary, said Diana, we could not afford to be stopped by disaster. Disaster must be retrieved.

Mr. Barton asked her—why? Were we never to admit that we were in the wrong?

The Viceroy and his advisers, she declared, were not likely to be wrong. And prestige had to be maintained.

At the word "prestige" the rugged face of the Labor member grew contemptuous and a little angry. He dealt with it as he was accustomed to deal with it in Socialist meetings or in Parliament. His touch in doing so was neither light nor conciliatory; the young lady, he thought, required plain speaking.

But so far from intimidating the young lady, he found in the course of a few more thrusts and parries that he had roused a by no means despicable antagonist. Diana was a mere mouth-piece; but she was the mouth-piece of eye-witnesses; whereas Barton was the mouth-piece of his daily newspaper and a handful of partisan books written to please the political section to which he belonged.

He began to stumble and to make mistakes—gross elementary mistakes in geography and fact—and therewith to lose his temper. Diana was upon him in a moment—very cool and graceful—controlling herself well; and it is probable that she would have won the day triumphantly but for the sudden intervention of her host.

Oliver Marsham had been watching her with mingled amusement and admiration. The slender figure held defiantly erect, the hands close-locked on the knee, the curly head with the air of a Niké—he could almost *see* the palm branch in the hand, the white dress and the silky hair, blown back by the blasts of victory!—appealed to a rhetorical element in his nature always closely combined both with his feelings and his ambitions. Headlong energy and partisanship—he was enchanted to find how beautiful they could be, and he threw himself into the discussion simply—at first—that he might prolong an emotion, might keep the red burning on her lip and cheek. That blundering fellow Barton should not have it all to himself!

But he was no sooner well in it than he too began to flounder. He rode off upon an inaccurate telegram in a morning paper; Diana fell upon it at once, tripped it up, exposed it, drove it from the field, while Mr. Ferrier

approved her from the background with a smiling eye and a quietly applauding hand. Then Marsham quoted a speech in the Indian Council.

Diana dismissed it with contempt, as the shaft of a *frondeur* discredited by both parties. He fell back on Blue Books, and other ponderosities—Barton by this time silent, or playing a clumsy chorus. But if Diana was not acquainted with these things in the ore, so to speak, she was more than a little acquainted with the missiles that could be forged from them. That very afternoon Hugh Roughsedge had pointed her to some of the best. She took them up—a little wildly now—for her coolness was departing—and for a time Marsham could hardly keep his footing.

A good many listeners were by now gathered round the disputants. Lady Niton, wielding some noisy knitting needles by the fireside, was enjoying the fray all the more that it seemed to be telling against Oliver. Mrs. Fotheringham, on the other hand, who came up occasionally to the circle, listened and went away again, was clearly seething with suppressed wrath, and had to be restrained once or twice by her brother from interfering, in a tone which would at once have put an end to a duel he himself only wished to prolong.

Mr. Ferrier perceived her annoyance, and smiled over it. In spite of his long friendship with the family, Isabel Fotheringham was no favorite with the great man. She had long seemed to him a type—a strange and modern type—of the feminine fanatic who allows political difference to interfere not only with private friendship but with the nearest and most sacred ties; and his philosopher's soul revolted. Let a woman talk politics, if she must, like this eager idealist girl—not with the venom

and gall of the half-educated politician. "As if we hadn't enough of that already!"

Other spectators paid more frivolous visits to the scene. Bobbie Forbes and Alicia Drake, attracted by the sounds of war, looked in from the next room. Forbes listened a moment, shrugged his shoulders, made a whistling mouth, and then walked off to a glass bookcase—the one sign of civilization in the vast room—where he was soon absorbed in early editions of English poets, Lady Lucy's inheritance from a literary father. Alicia moved about, a little restless and scornful, now listening unwillingly, and now attempting diversions. But in these she found no one to second her, not even the two pink-and-white nieces of Lady Lucy, who did not understand a word of what was going on, but were none the less gazing open-mouthed at Diana.

Marion Vincent meanwhile had drawn nearer to Diana. Her strong significant face wore a quiet smile; there was a friendly, even an admiring penetration in the look with which she watched the young prophetess of Empire and of War. As for Lady Lucy, she was silent, and rather grave. In her secret mind she thought that young girls should not be vehement or presumptuous. It was a misfortune that this pretty creature had not been more reasonably brought up; a mother's hand had been wanting. While not only Mr. Ferrier and Mrs. Colwood, sitting side by side in the background, but everybody else present, in some measure or degree, was aware of some play of feeling in the scene, beyond and behind the obvious, some hidden forces, or rather, perhaps, some emerging relation, which gave it significance and thrill. The duel was a duel of brains—unequal at that; what made it fascinating was the universal

or typical element in the clash of the two personalities—the man using his whole strength, more and more tyrannously, more and more stubbornly—the girl resisting, flashing, appealing, fighting for dear life, now gaining, now retreating—and finally overborne.

For Marsham's staying powers, naturally, were the greater. He summoned finally all his nerve and all his knowledge. The air of the carpet-knight with which he had opened battle disappeared; he fought seriously and for victory. And suddenly Diana laughed—a little hysterically—and gave in. He had carried her into regions of history and politics where she could not follow. She dropped her head in her hands a moment—then fell back in her chair—silenced—her beautiful passionate eyes fixed on Marsham, as his were on her.

"Brava! Brava!" cried Mr. Ferrier, clapping his hands. The room joined in laughter and applause.

A few minutes later the ladies streamed out into the hall on their way to bed. Marsham came to light a candle for Diana.

"Do you forgive me?" he said, as he gave it to her.

The tone was gay and apologetic.

She laughed unsteadily, without reply.

"When will you take your revenge?"

She shook her head, touched his hand for "good-night," and went up-stairs.

As Diana reached her room she drew Mrs. Colwood in with her—but not, it seemed, for purposes of conversation. She stood absently by the fire taking off her bracelets and necklace. Mrs. Colwood made a few remarks about the evening and the guests, with little response, and presently wondered why she was detained.

At last Diana put up her hands, and smoothed back the hair from her temples with a long sigh. Then she laid a sudden grasp upon Mrs. Colwood, and looked earnestly and imploringly into her face.

"Will you—please—call me Diana? And—and—will you kiss me?"

She humbly stooped her head. Mrs. Colwood, much touched, threw her arms around her, and kissed her heartily. Then a few warm words fell from her—as to the scene of the evening. Diana withdrew herself at once, shivering a little.

"Oh, I want papa!" she said—"I want him so much!"

And she hid her eyes against the mantel-piece.

Mrs. Colwood soothed her affectionately, perhaps expecting some outburst of confidence, which, however, did not come. Diana said a quiet "good-night," and they parted.

But it was long before Mrs. Colwood could sleep. Was the emotion she had just witnessed—flinging itself geyserlike into sight, only to sink back as swiftly out of ken—was it an effect of the past or an omen of the future? The longing expressed in the girl's heart and voice, after the brave show she had made—had it overpowered her just because she felt herself alone, without natural protectors, on the brink of her woman's destiny?

CHAPTER IV

THE next day, when Diana looked out from her window, she saw a large and dreary park wrapped in scudding rain which promised evil things for the shooting-party of the day. Mr. Marsham senior had apparently laid out his park and grounds on the same principles as those on which he had built his house. Everything was large and expensive. The woods and plantations were kept to a nicety; not a twig was out of place. Enormous cost had been incurred in the planting of rare evergreens; full-grown trees had been transplanted wholesale from a distance, and still wore in many cases a sickly and invalided air; and elaborate contrasts in dark and light foliage had been arranged by the landscape-gardener employed. Dark plantations had a light border—light plantatons a dark one. A lake or large pond, with concrete banks and two artificial islands, held the centre of the park, and on the monotonous stretches of immaculate grass there were deer to be seen wherever anybody could reasonably expect them.

Diana surveyed it all with a lively dislike. She pitied Lady Lucy and Mr. Marsham because they must live in such a place. Especially, surely, must it be hampering and disconcerting to a man, preaching the democratic gospel, and looking forward to the democratic millennium, to be burdened with a house and estate which could offer so few excuses for the wealth of which they

made an arrogant and uninviting display. Immense possessions and lavish expenditure may be, as we all know, so softened by antiquity, or so masked by taste, as not to jar with ideals the most different or remote. But here "proputty! proputty!" was the cry of every ugly wood and tasteless shrubbery, whereas the prospective owner of them, according to his public utterances and career, was magnificently careless of property—was, in fact, in the eyes of the lovers of property, its enemy. The house again spoke loudly and aggressively of money; yet it was the home of a champion of the poor.

Well—a man cannot help it, if his father has suffered from stupidity and bad taste; and encumbrances of this kind are more easily created than got rid of. No doubt Oliver Marsham's democratic opinions had been partly bred in him by opposition and recoil. Diana seemed to get a good deal of rather comforting light on the problem by looking at it from this point of view.

Indeed, she thought over it persistently while she dressed. From the normal seven-hours' sleep of youth she had awakened with braced nerves. To remember her duel of the night before was no longer to thrill with an excitement inexplicable even to herself, and strangely mingled with a sense of loneliness or foreboding. Under the morning light she looked at things more sanely. Her natural vanity, which was the reflection of her wish to please, told her that she had not done badly. She felt a childish pleasure in the memory of Mr. Barton's discomfiture; and as to Mr. Marsham, it was she, and not her beliefs, not the great Imperial "cause" which had been beaten. How could she expect to hold her own with the professional politician when it came really to business? In her heart of hearts she knew that she

would have despised Oliver Marsham if he had not been able to best her in argument. "If it had been papa," she thought, proudly, "that would have been another story!"

Nevertheless, as she sat meekly under the hands of her maid, smiles "went out and in," as she remembered the points where she had pressed him hard, had almost overcome him. An inclination to measure herself with him again danced within her. Will against will, mind against mind—her temperament, in its morning rally, delighted in the thought. And all the time there hovered before her the living man, with his agreeable, energetic, challenging presence. How much better she had liked him, even in his victory of the evening, than in the carping sarcastic mood of the afternoon!

In spite of gayety and expectation, however, she felt her courage fail her a little as she left her room and ventured out into the big populous house. Her solitary bringing-up had made her liable to fits of shyness amid her general expansiveness, and it was a relief to meet no one—least of all, Alicia Drake—on her way down-stairs. Mrs. Colwood, indeed, was waiting for her at the end of the passage, and Diana held her hand a little as they descended.

A male voice was speaking in the hall—Mr. Marsham giving the last directions for the day to the head keeper. The voice was sharp and peremptory—too peremptory, one might have thought, for democracy addressing a brother. But the keeper, a gray-haired, weather-beaten man of fifty, bowed himself out respectfully, and Marsham turned to greet Diana. Mrs. Colwood saw the kindling of his eyes as they fell on the girl's morning freshness. No sharpness in the voice now!—he was all eagerness to escort and serve his guests.

He led them to the breakfast-room, which seemed to be in an uproar, caused apparently by Bobbie Forbes and Lady Niton, who were talking at each other across the table.

"What is the matter?" asked Diana, as she slipped into a place to which Sir James Chide smilingly invited her—between himself and Mr. Bobbie.

Sir James, making a pretence of shutting his ears against the din, replied that he believed Mr. Forbes was protesting against the tyranny of Lady Niton in obliging him to go to church.

"She never enters a place of worship herself, but she insists that her young men friends shall go.—Mr. Bobbie is putting his foot down!"

"Miss Mallory, let me get you some fish," said Forbes, turning to her with a flushed and determined countenance. "I have now vindicated the rights of man, and am ready to attend—if you will allow me—to the wants of woman. Fish?—or bacon?"

Diana made her choice, and the young man supplied her; then bristling with victory, and surrounded by samples of whatever food the breakfast-table afforded, he sat down to his own meal. "No!" he said, with energy, addressing Diana. "One must really draw the line. The last Sunday Lady Niton took me to church, the service lasted an hour and three-quarters. I am a High Churchman—I vow I am—an out-and-outer. I go in for snippets—and shortening things. The man here is a dreadful old Erastian—piles on everything you can pile on—so I just felt it necessary to give Lady Niton notice. To-morrow I have work for the department—*at home!* Take my advice, Miss Mallory—don't go."

"I'm not staying over Sunday," smiled Diana.

The young man expressed his regret. "I say," he said, with a quick look round, "you didn't think I was rude last night, did you?"

"Rude? When?"

"In not listening. I can't listen when people talk politics. I want to drown myself. Now, if it was poetry —or something reasonable. You know the only things worth looking at—in this beastly house"—he lowered his voice—"are the books in that glass bookcase. It was Lady Lucy's father—old Lord Merston—collected them. Lady Lucy never looks at them. Marsham does, I suppose—sometimes. Do you know Marsham well?"

"I made acquaintance with him and Lady Lucy on the Riviera."

Mr. Bobbie observed her with a shrewd eye. In spite of his inattention of the night before, the interest of Miss Mallory's appearance upon the scene at Tallyn had not been lost upon him, any more than upon other people. The rumor had preceded her arrival that Marsham had been very much "smitten" with her amid the pine woods of Portofino. Marsham's taste was good—emphatically good. At the same time it was clear that the lady was no mere facile and commonplace girl. It was Forbes's opinion, based on the scene of the previous evening, that there might be a good deal of wooing to be done.

"There are so many things I wanted to show you—and to talk about!" said Oliver Marsham, confidentially, to Diana, in the hall after breakfast—"but this horrid shoot will take up all the day! If the weather is not too bad, I think some of the ladies meant to join us at luncheon. Will you venture?"

His tone was earnest; his eyes indorsed it. Diana hoped it might be possible to come. Marsham lingered beside her to the last minute; but presently final orders had to be given to keepers, and country neighbors began to arrive.

"They do the thing here on an enormous scale," said Bobbie Forbes, lounging and smoking beside Diana; "it's almost the biggest shoot in the county. Amusing, isn't it?—in this Radical house. Do you see that man McEwart?"

Diana turned her attention upon the young member of Parliament who had arrived the night before—plain, sandy-haired, with a long flat-backed head, and a gentlemanly manner.

"I suspect a good deal's going on here behind the scenes," said Bobbie, dropping his voice. "That man Barton may be a fool to talk, but he's a great power in the House with the other Labor men. And McEwart has been hand and glove with Marsham all this Session. They're trying to force Ferrier's hand. Some Bill the Labor men want—and Ferrier won't hear of. A good many people say we shall see Marsham at the head of a Fourth Party of his own very soon. *Se soumettre, ou se démettre!*—well, it may come to that—for old Ferrier. But I'll back him to fight his way through."

"How can Mr. Marsham oppose him?" asked Diana, in wonder, and some indignation with her companion. "He is the Leader of the party, and besides—they are such friends!"

Forbes looked rather amused at her womanish view of things. "Friends? I should rather think so!"

By this time he and Diana were strolling up and down the winter garden opening out of the hall, which was now

full of a merry crowd waiting for the departure of the shooters. Suddenly Forbes paused.

"Do you see that?"

Diana's eyes followed his till they perceived Lady Lucy sitting a little way off under a camellia-tree covered with red blossom. Her lap was heaped with the letters of the morning. Mr. Ferrier, with a cigarette in his mouth, stood beside her, reading the sheets of a letter which she handed to him as she herself finished them. Every now and then she spoke to him, and he replied. In the little scene, between the slender white-haired woman and the middle-aged man, there was something so intimate, so conjugal even, that Diana involuntarily turned away as though to watch it were an impertinence.

"Rather touching, isn't it?" said the youth, smiling benevolently. "Of course you know—there's a romance, or rather *was*—long ago. My mother knew all about it. Since old Marsham's death, Lady Lucy's never done a thing without Ferrier to advise her. Why she hasn't married him, that's the puzzle.—But she's a curious woman, is Lady Lucy. Looks so soft, but—" He pursed up his lips with an important air.

"Anyhow, she depends a lot on Ferrier. He's constantly here whenever he can be spared from London and Parliament. He got Oliver into Parliament—his first seat I mean—for Manchester. The Ferriers are very big people up there, and old Ferrier's recommendation of him just put him in straight—no trouble about it! Oh! and before that when he was at Eton—and Oxford too—Ferrier looked after him like a father.—Used to have him up for exeats—and talk to the Head—and keep his mother straight—like an old brick. Ferrier's a splendid chap!"

Diana warmly agreed.

"Perhaps you know," pursued the chatterbox, "that this place is all hers—Lady Lucy's. She can leave it and her money exactly as she pleases. It is to be hoped she won't leave much of it to Mrs. Fotheringham. *Isn't* that a woman! Ah! you don't know her yet. Hullo!—there's Marsham after me."

For Marsham was beckoning from the hall. They returned hurriedly.

"Who made Oliver that waistcoat?" said Lady Niton, putting on her spectacles.

"I did," said Alicia Drake, as she came up, with her arm round the younger of Lady Niton's nieces. "Isn't it becoming?"

"Hum!" said Lady Niton, in a gruff tone, "young ladies can always find new ways of wasting their time."

Marsham approached Diana.

"We're just off," he said, smiling. "The clouds are lifting. You'll come?"

"What, to lunch?" said Lady Niton, just behind. "Of course they will. What else is there for the women to do? Congratulate you on your waistcoat, Oliver."

"Isn't it superb?" he said, drawing himself up with mock majesty, so as to show it off. "I am Alicia's debtor for life."

Yet a careful ear might have detected something a little hollow in the tone.

Lady Niton looked at him, and then at Miss Drake, evidently restraining her sharp tongue for once, though with difficulty. Marsham lingered a moment making some last arrangements for the day with his sister. Diana noticed that he towered over the men among whom he stood; and she felt herself suddenly delighting

in his height, in his voice which was remarkably refined and agreeable, in his whole capable and masterful presence. Bobbie Forbes standing beside him was dwarfed to insignificance, and he seemed to be conscious of it, for he rose on his toes a little, involuntarily copying Marsham's attitude, and looking up at him.

As the shooters departed, Forbes bringing up the rear, Lady Niton laid her wrinkled hand on his arm.

"Never mind, Bobbie, never mind!"—she smiled at him confidentially. "We can't all be six foot."

Bobbie stared at her—first fiercely—then exploded with laughter, shook off her hand and departed.

Lady Niton, evidently much pleased with herself, came back to the window where most of the other ladies stood watching the shooters with their line of beaters crossing the lawn toward the park beyond. "Ah!" she said, "I thought Alicia would see the last of them!"

For Miss Drake, in defiance of wind and spitting rain, was walking over the lawn the centre of a large group, with Marsham beside her. Her white serge dress and the blue shawl she had thrown over her fair head made a brilliant spot in the dark wavering line.

"Alicia is very picturesque," said Mrs. Fotheringham, turning away.

"Yes—and last summer Oliver seemed to be well aware of it," said Lady Niton, in her ear.

"Was he? He has always been very good friends with Alicia."

"He could have done without the waistcoat," said Lady Niton, sharply.

"Aren't you rather unkind? She began it last summer, and finished it yesterday. Then, of course, she

presented it to him. I don't see why that should expose her to remarks."

"One can't help making remarks about Alicia," said Lady Niton, calmly, "and she can defend herself so well."

"Poor Alicia!"

"Confess you wouldn't like Oliver to marry her."

"Oliver never had any thought of it."

Lady Niton shook her queer gray head.

"Oliver paid her a good deal of attention last summer. Alicia must certainly have considered the matter. And she is a young lady not easily baffled."

"Baffled!" Mrs. Fotheringham laughed. "What can she do?"

"Well, it's true that Oliver seems to have got another idea in his head. What do you think of that pretty child who came yesterday—the Mallory girl?"

Mrs. Fotheringham hesitated, then said, coldly:

"I don't like discussing these things. Oliver has plenty of time before him."

"If he is turning his thoughts in that quarter," persisted Lady Niton, "I give him my blessing. Well bred, handsome, and well off—what's your objection?"

Mrs. Fotheringham laughed impatiently. "Really, Lady Niton, I made no objection."

"You don't like her!"

"I have only known her twenty-four hours. How can I have formed any opinion about her?"

"No—you don't like her! I suppose you thought she talked stuff last night?"

"Well, there can be no two opinions about that!" cried Mrs. Fotheringham. "Her father seems to have filled her head with all sorts of false Jingo notions, and I must say I wondered Oliver was so patient with her."

Lady Niton glanced at the thin fanatical face of the speaker.

"Oliver had great difficulty in holding his own. She is no fool, and you'll find it out, Isabel, if you try to argue her down—"

"I shouldn't dream of arguing with such a child!"

"Well, all I know is Ferrier seemed to admire her performance."

Mrs. Fotheringham paused a moment, then said, with harsh intensity:

"Men have not the same sense of responsibility."

"You mean their brains are befogged by a pretty face?"

"They don't put non-essentials aside, as we do. A girl like that, in love with what she calls 'glory' and 'prestige,' is a dangerous and demoralizing influence. That glorification of the Army is at the root of half our crimes!"

Mrs. Fotheringham's pale skin had flushed till it made one red with her red hair. Lady Niton looked at her with mingled amusement and irritation. She wondered why men married such women as Isabel Fotheringham. Certainly Ned Fotheringham himself—deceased some three years before this date—had paid heavily for his mistake; especially through the endless disputes which had arisen between his children and his second wife —partly on questions of religion, partly on this matter of the Army. Mrs. Fotheringham was an agnostic; her stepsons, the children of a devout mother, were churchmen. Influenced, moreover, by a small coterie, in which, to the dismay of her elderly husband, she had passed most of her early married years, she detested the Army as a brutal influence on the national life. Her youngest

step-son, however, had insisted on becoming a soldier. She broke with him, and with his brothers who supported him. Now a childless widow, without ties and moderately rich, she was free to devote herself to her ideas. In former days she would have been a religious bigot of the first water; the bigotry was still there; only the subjects of it were changed.

Lady Niton delighted in attacking her; yet was not without a certain respect for her. Old sceptic that she was, ideals of any sort imposed upon her. How people came by them, she herself could never imagine.

On this particular morning, however, Mrs. Fotheringham did not allow herself as long a wrangle as usual with her old adversary. She went off, carrying an armful of letters with large enclosures, and Lady Niton understood that for the rest of the morning she would be as much absorbed by her correspondence—mostly on public questions—as the Leader of the Opposition himself, to whom the library was sacredly given up.

"When that woman takes a dislike," she thought to herself, "it sticks! She has taken a dislike to the Mallory girl. Well, if Oliver wants her, let him fight for her. I hope she won't drop into his mouth! Mallory! Mallory! I wonder where she comes from, and who her people are."

Meanwhile Diana was sitting among her letters, which mainly concerned the last details of the Beechcote furnishing. She and Mrs. Colwood were now "Muriel" and "Diana" to each other, and Mrs. Colwood had been admitted to a practical share in Diana's small anxieties.

Suddenly Diana, who had just opened a hitherto unread letter, exclaimed:

"Oh, but *how* delightful!"

Mrs. Colwood looked up; Diana's aspect was one of sparkling pleasure and surprise.

"One of my Barbadoes' cousins is here—in London—actually in London—and I knew nothing of her coming. She writes to me.—Of course she must come to Beechcote—she must come at once!"

She sprang up, and went to a writing-table near, to look for a telegraph form. She wrote a message with eagerness, despatched it, and then explained as coherently as her evident emotion and excitement would allow.

"They are my only relations in the world—that I know of—that papa ever spoke to me about. Mamma's sister married Mr. Merton. He was a planter in Barbadoes. He died about three years ago, but his widow and daughters have lived on there. They were very poor and couldn't afford to come home. Fanny is the eldest—I think she must be about twenty."

Diana paced up and down, with her hands behind her, wondering when her telegram would reach her cousin, who was staying at a London boarding-house, when she might be expected at Beechcote, how long she could be persuaded to stay—speculations, in fact, innumerable. Her agitation was pathetic in Mrs. Colwood's eyes. It testified to the girl's secret sense of forlornness, to her natural hunger for the ties and relationships other girls possessed in such abundance.

Mrs. Colwood inquired if it was long since she had had news of her cousins.

"Oh, some years!" said Diana, vaguely. "I remember a letter coming—before we went to the East—and papa reading it. I know"—she hesitated—"I know he didn't like Mr. Merton."

She stood still a moment, thinking. The lights and shadows of reviving memory crossed her face, and presently her thought emerged, with very little hint to her companion of the course it had been taking out of sight.

"Papa always thought it a horrid life for them—Aunt Merton and the girls—especially after they gave up their estate and came to live in the town. But how could they help it? They must have been very poor. Fanny"—she took up the letter—"Fanny says she has come home to learn music and French—that she may earn money by teaching when she goes back. She doesn't write very well, does she?"

She held out the sheet.

The handwriting, indeed, was remarkably illiterate, and Mrs. Colwood could only say that probably a girl of Miss Merton's circumstances had had few advantages.

"But then, you see, we'll *give* her advantages!" cried Diana, throwing herself down at Mrs. Colwood's feet, and beginning to plan aloud.—"You know if she will only stay with us, we can easily have people down from London for lessons. And she can have the green bedroom—over the dining-room—can't she?—and the library to practise in. It would be absurd that she should stay in London, at a horrid boarding-house, when there's Beechcote, wouldn't it?"

Mrs. Colwood agreed that Beechcote would probably be quite convenient for Miss Merton's plans. If she felt a little pang at the thought that her pleasant *tête-à-tête* with her new charge was to be so soon interrupted, and for an indefinite period, by a young lady with the handwriting of a scullery-maid, she kept it entirely hidden.

Diana talked herself into the most rose-colored plans for Fanny Merton's benefit—so voluminous, indeed, that

Mrs. Colwood had to leave her in the middle of them that she might go up-stairs and mend a rent in her walking-dress. Diana was left alone in the drawing-room, still smiling and dreaming. In her impulsive generosity she saw herself as the earthly providence of her cousin, sharing with a dear kinswoman her own unjustly plentiful well-being.

Then she took up the letter again. It ran thus:

"My dear Diana,—You mustn't think it cheeky my calling you that, but I am your real cousin, and mother told me to write to you. I hope too you won't be ashamed of us though we are poor. Everybody knows us in Barbadoes, though of course that's not London. I am the eldest of the family, and I got very tired of living all in a pie, and so I've come home to England to better myself.—A year ago I was engaged to be married, but the young man behaved badly. A good riddance, all my friends told me—but it wasn't a pleasant experience. Anyway now I want to earn some money, and see the world a little. I have got rather a good voice, and I am considered handsome—at least smart-looking. If you are not too grand to invite me to your place, I should like to come and see you, but of course you must do as you please. I got your address from the bank Uncle Mallory used to send us checks on. I can tell you we have missed those checks pretty badly this last year. I hope you have now got over your great sorrow.—This boarding-house is horribly poky but cheap, which is the great thing. I arrived the night before last,

"And I am

"Your affectionate cousin

"Fanny Merton."

No, it really was not an attractive letter. On the second reading, Diana pushed it away from her, rather hastily. Then she reminded herself again, elaborately, of the Mertons' disadvantages in life, painting them in imagination as black as possible. And before she had gone far with this process all doubt and distaste were

once more swept away by the rush of yearning, of an interest she could not subdue, in this being of her own flesh and blood, the child of her mother's sister. She sat with flushed cheeks, absorbed in a stream of thoughts and reminiscence.

"You look as though you had had good news," said Sir James Chide, as he paused beside her on his way through the drawing-room. He was not a sportsman; nor was Mr. Ferrier.

His eyes rested upon her with such a kind interest, his manner showed so plainly yet again that he desired to be her friend, that Diana responded at once.

"I have found a cousin!" she said, gayly, and told the story of her expected visitor.

Outwardly—perfunctorily—Sir James's aspect while she was speaking answered to hers. If she was pleased, he was pleased too. He congratulated her; he entered into her schemes for Miss Merton's amusement. Really, all the time, the man's aspect was singularly grave, he listened carefully to every word; he observed the speaker.

"The young lady's mother is your aunt?"

"She was my mother's sister."

"And they have been long in Barbadoes?"

"I think they migrated there just about the same time we went abroad—after my mother's death."

Sir James said little. He encouraged her to talk on; he listened to the phrases of memory or expectation which revealed her history—her solitary bringing-up—her reserved and scholarly father—the singular closeness, and yet as it seemed strangeness of her relation to him. It appeared, for instance, that it was only an accident, some years before, which had revealed to Diana

the very existence of these cousins. Her father had never spoken of them spontaneously.

"I hope she will be everything that is charming and delightful," he said at last as he rose. "And remember—I am to come and see you!"

He stooped his gray head, and gently touched her hand with an old man's freedom.

Diana warmly renewed her invitation.

"There is a house near you that I often go to—Sir William Felton's. I am to be there in a few weeks. Perhaps I shall even be able to make acquaintance with Miss Fanny!"

He walked away from her.

Diana could not see the instant change of countenance which accompanied the movement. Urbanity, gentleness, kind indulgence vanished. Sir James looked anxious and disturbed; and he seemed to be talking to himself.

The rest of the morning passed heavily. Diana wrote some letters, and devoutly hoped the rain would stop. In the intervals of her letter-writing, or her study of the clouds, she tried to make friends with Miss Drake and Mrs. Fotheringham. But neither effort came to good. Alicia, so expansive, so theatrical, so much the centre of the situation, when she chose, could be equally prickly, monosyllabic, and repellent when it suited her to be so. Diana talked timidly of dress, of London, and the Season. They were the subjects on which it seemed most natural to approach Miss Drake; Diana's attitude was inquiring and propitiatory. But Alicia could find none but careless or scanty replies till Madeleine Varley came up. Then Miss Drake's tongue was loosened. To her, as to an equal and intimate, she displayed her expert

knowledge of shops and *modistes*, of "people" and their stories. Diana sat snubbed and silent, a little provincial outsider, for whom "seasons" are not made. Nor was it any better with Mrs. Fotheringham. At twelve o'clock that lady brought the London papers into the drawing-room. Further information had been received from the Afghan frontier. The English loss in the engagement already reported was greater than had been at first supposed; and Diana found the name of an officer she had known in India among the dead. As she pondered the telegram, the tears in her eyes, she heard Mrs. Fotheringham describe the news as "on the whole very satisfactory." The nation required the lesson. Whereupon Diana's tongue was loosed and would not be quieted. She dwelt hotly on the "sniping," the treacheries, the midnight murders which had preceded the expedition. Mrs. Fotheringham listened to her with flashing looks, and suddenly she broke into a denunciation of war, the military spirit, and the ignorant and unscrupulous persons at home, especially women, who aid and abet politicians in violence and iniquity, the passion of which soon struck Diana dumb. Here was no honorable fight of equal minds. She was being punished for her advocacy of the night before, by an older woman of tyrannical temper, toward whom she stood in the relation of guest to host. It was in vain to look round for defenders. The only man present was Mr. Barton, who sat listening with ill-concealed smiles to what was going on, without taking part in it.

Diana extricated herself with as much dignity as she could muster, but she was too young to take the matter philosophically. She went up-stairs burning with anger, the tears of hurt feeling in her eyes. It seemed to her

that Mrs. Fotheringham's attack implied a personal dislike; Mr. Marsham's sister had been glad to "take it out of her." To this young cherished creature it was almost her first experience of the kind.

On the way up-stairs she paused to look wistfully out of a staircase window. Still raining—alack! She thought with longing of the open fields, and the shooters. Was there to be no escape all day from the ugly oppressive house, and some of its inmates? Half shyly, yet with a quickening of the heart, she remembered Marsham's farewell to her of that morning, his look of the night before. Intellectually, she was comparatively mature; in other respects, as inexperienced and impressionable as any convent girl.

"I fear luncheon is impossible!" said Lady Lucy's voice.

Diana looked up and saw her descending the stairs.

"Such a pity! Oliver will be so disappointed."

She paused beside her guest—an attractive and distinguished figure. On her white hair she wore a lace cap which was tied very precisely under her delicate chin. Her dress, of black satin, was made in a full plain fashion of her own; she had long since ceased to allow her dressmaker any voice in it; and her still beautiful hands flashed with diamonds, not however in any vulgar profusion. Lady Lucy's mother had been of a Quaker family, and though Quakerism in her had been deeply alloyed with other metals, the moral and intellectual self-dependence of Quakerism, its fastidious reserves and discrimination were very strong in her. Discrimination indeed was the note of her being. For every Christian, some Christian precepts are obsolete. For Lady Lucy that which runs—"Judge Not!"—had never been alive.

Her emphatic reference to Marsham had brought the ready color to Diana's cheeks.

"Yes—there seems no chance!—" she said, shyly, and regretfully, as the rain beat on the window.

"Oh, dear me, yes!" said a voice behind them. "The glass is going up. It 'll be a fine afternoon—and we'll go and meet them at Holme Copse. Sha'n't we, Lady Lucy?"

Mr. Ferrier appeared, coming up from the library laden with papers. The three stood chatting together on the broad gallery which ran round the hall. The kindness of the two elders was so marked that Diana's spirits returned; she was not to be quite a pariah it seemed! As she walked away toward her room, Mr. Ferrier's eyes pursued her—the slim round figure, the young loveliness of her head and neck.

"Well!—what are you thinking about her?" he said, eagerly, turning to the mistress of the house.

Lady Lucy smiled.

"I should prefer it if she didn't talk politics," she said, with the slightest possible stiffness. "But she seems a very charming girl."

"She talks politics, my dear lady, because living alone with her father and with her books, she has had nothing else to talk about but politics and books. Would you rather she talked scandal—or Monte Carlo?"

The Quaker in Lady Lucy laughed.

"Of course if she married Oliver, she would subordinate her opinions to his."

"Would she!" said Mr. Ferrier—"I'm not so sure!"

Lady Lucy replied that if not, it would be calamitous. In which she spoke sincerely. For although now the ruler, and, if the truth were known, the somewhat

despotic ruler of Tallyn, in her husband's lifetime she had known very well how to obey.

"I have asked various people about the Mallorys," she resumed. "But nobody seems to be able to tell me anything."

"I trace her to Sir Thomas of that ilk. Why not? It is a Welsh name!"

"I have no idea who her mother was," said Lady Lucy, musing. "Her father was very refined—*quite* a gentleman."

"She bears, I think, very respectable witness to her mother," laughed Ferrier. "Good stock on both sides; she carries it in her face."

"That's all I ask," said Lady Lucy, quietly.

"But that you *do* ask!" Her companion looked at her with an eye half affectionate, half ironic. "Most exclusive of women! I sometimes wish I might unveil your real opinions to the Radical fellows who come here."

Lady Lucy colored faintly.

"That has nothing to do with politics."

"Hasn't it? I can't imagine anything that has more to do with them."

"I was thinking of character—honorable tradition—not blood."

Ferrier shook his head.

"Won't do. Barton wouldn't pass you—'A man's a man for a' that'—and a woman too."

"Then I am a Tory!" said Lady Lucy, with a smile that shot pleasantly through her gray eyes.

"At last you confess it!" cried Ferrier, as he carried off his papers. But his gayety soon departed. He stood awhile at the window in his room, looking out upon the sodden park—a rather gray and sombre figure. Over his

ugly impressiveness a veil of weariness had dropped. Politics and the strife of parties, the devices of enemies and the dissatisfaction of friends—his soul was tired of them. And the emergence of this possible love-affair—for the moment, ardent and deep as were the man's affections and sympathies, toward this Marsham household, it did but increase his sense of moral fatigue. If the flutter in the blood—and the long companionship of equal love—if these were the only things of real value in life—how had *his* been worth living?

CHAPTER V

THE last covert had been shot, and as Marsham and his party, followed by scattered groups of beaters, turned homeward over the few fields that separated them from the park, figures appeared coming toward them in the rosy dusk—Mr. Ferrier and Diana in front, with most of the other guests of the house in their train. There was a merry fraternization between the two parties—a characteristic English scene, in a characteristic setting: the men in their tweed shooting-suits, some with their guns over their shoulders, for the most part young and tall, clean-limbed and clear-eyed, the well-to-do Englishman at his most English moment, and brimming with the joy of life; the girls dressed in the same tweed stuffs, and with the same skilled and expensive simplicity, but wearing, some of them, over their cloth caps, bright veils, white or green or blue, which were tied under their chins, and framed faces aglow with exercise and health.

Marsham's eyes flew to Diana, who was in black, with a white veil. Some of the natural curls on her temples, which reminded him of a Vandyck picture, had been a little blown by the wind across her beautiful brow; he liked the touch of wildness that they gave; and he was charmed anew by the contrast between her frank young strength, and the wistful look, so full of *relation* to all about it, as though seeking to understand and be one with it. He perceived too her childish pleasure in each

fresh incident and experience of the English winter, which proved to her anew that she had come home; and he flattered himself, as he went straight to her side, that his coming had at least no dimming effect on the radiance that had been there before.

"I believe you are not pining for the Mediterranean!" he said, laughing, as they walked on together.

In a smiling silence she drew in a great breath of the frosty air while her eyes ranged along the chalk down, on the western edge of which they were walking, and then over the plain at their feet, the smoke wreaths that hung above the villages, the western sky filled stormily with the purples and grays and crimsons of the sunset, the woods that climbed the down, or ran in a dark rampart along its crest.

"No one can ever love it as much as I do!"—she said at last—"because I have been an exile. That will be my advantage always."

"Your compensation—perhaps."

"Mrs. Colwood puts it that way. Only I don't like having my grievance taken away."

"Against whom?"

"Ah! not against papa!" she said, hurriedly—"against Fate!"

"If you dislike being deprived of a grievance—so do I. You have returned me my Rossetti."

She laughed merrily.

"You made sure I should lose or keep it?"

"It is the first book that anybody has returned to me for years. I was quite resigned."

"To a damaging estimate of my character? Thank you very much!"

"I wonder"—he said, in another tone—"what sort

of estimate you have of *my* character — false, or true?"

"Well, there have been a great many surprises!" said Diana, raising her eyebrows.

"In the matter of my character?"

"Not altogether."

"My surroundings? You mean I talked Radicalism—or, as you would call it, Socialism—to you at Portofino, and here you find me in the character of a sporting Squire?"

"I hear"—she said, deliberately looking about her—"that this is the finest shoot in the county."

"It is. There is no denying it. But, in the first place, it's my mother's shoot, not mine—the estate is hers, not mine—and she wishes old customs to be kept up. In the next—well, of course, the truth is that I like it abominably!"

He had thrust his cap into his pocket, and was walking bareheaded. In the glow of the evening air his strong manhood seemed to gain an added force and vitality. He moved beside her, magnified and haloed, as it were, by the dusk and the sunset. Yet his effect upon her was no mere physical effect of good looks and a fine stature. It was rather the effect of a personality which strangely fitted with and evoked her own—of that congruity, indeed, from which all else springs.

She laughed at his confession.

"I hear also that you are the best shot in the neighborhood."

"Who has been talking to you about me?" he asked, with a slight knitting of the brows.

"Mr. Ferrier—a little."

He gave an impatient sigh, so disproportionate to the

tone of their conversation, that Diana looked at him in sudden surprise.

"Haven't you often wondered how it is that the very people who know you best know you least?"

The question was impetuously delivered. Diana recalled Mr. Forbes's remarks as to dissensions behind the scenes. She stepped cautiously.

"I thought Mr. Ferrier knew everything!"

"I wish he knew something about his party—and the House of Commons!" cried Marsham, as though a passion within leaped to the surface.

The startled eyes beside him beguiled him further.

"I didn't mean to say anything indiscreet—or disloyal," he said, with a smile, recovering himself. "It is often the greatest men who cling to the old world—when the new is clamoring. But the new means to be heard all the same."

Diana's color flashed.

"I would rather be in that old world with Mr. Ferrier than in the new with Mr. Barton!"

"What is the use of talking of preferences? The world is what it is—and will be what it will be. Barton is our master—Ferrier's and mine. The point is to come to terms, and make the best of it."

"No!—the point is—to hold the gate!—and die on the threshold, if need be."

They had come to a stile. Marsham had crossed it, and Diana mounted. Her young form showed sharply against the west; he looked into her eyes, divided between laughter and feeling; she gave him her hand. The man's pulses leaped anew. He was naturally of a cool and self-possessed temperament—the life of the brain much stronger in him than the life of the senses. But at that

moment he recognized—as perhaps, for the first time, the night before—that Nature and youth had him at last in grip. At the same time the remembrance of a walk over the same ground that he had taken in the autumn with Alicia Drake flashed, unwelcomed, into his mind. It stirred a half-uneasy, half-laughing compunction. He could not flatter himself—yet—that his cousin had forgotten it.

"What gate?—and what threshold?" he asked Diana, as they moved on. "If you mean the gate of power—it is too late. Democracy is in the citadel—and has run up its own flag. Or to take another metaphor—the Whirlwind is in possession—the only question is who shall ride it!"

Diana declared that the Socialists would ride it to the abyss—with England on the crupper.

"Magnificent!" said Marsham, "but merely rhetorical. Besides—all that we ask, is that Ferrier should ride it. Let him only try the beast—and he will find it tame enough."

"And if he won't?—"

"Ah, if he won't—" said Marsham, uncertainly, and paused. In the growing darkness she could no longer see his face plainly. But presently he resumed, more earnestly and simply.

"Don't misunderstand me! Ferrier is our chief—my chief, above all—and one does not even discuss whether one is loyal to him. The party owes him an enormous debt. As for myself—" He drew a long breath, which was again a sigh.

Then with a change of manner, and in a lighter tone: "I seem to have given myself away—to an enemy!"

"Poor enemy!"

"THE MAN'S PULSES LEAPED ANEW"

He looked at her, half laughing, half anxious.

"Tell me!—last night—you thought me intolerant—overbearing?"

"I disliked being beaten," said Diana, candidly; "especially as it was only my ignorance that was beaten—not my cause."

"Shall we begin again?"

Through his gayety, however, a male satisfaction in victory pierced very plainly. Diana winced a little.

"No, no! I must go back to Captain Roughsedge first and get some new arguments!"

"Roughsedge!" he said, in surprise. "Roughsedge? He never carried an argument through in his life!"

Diana defended her new friend to ears unsympathetic. Her defence, indeed, evoked from him a series of the same impatient, sarcastic remarks on the subject of the neighbors as had scandalized her the day before. She fired up, and they were soon in the midst of another battle-royal, partly on the merits of particular persons and partly on a more general theme—the advantage or disadvantage of an optimist view of your fellow-creatures.

Marsham was, before long, hard put to it in argument, and very delicately and discreetly convicted of arrogance or worse. They were entering the woods of the park when he suddenly stopped and said:

"Do you know that you have had a jolly good revenge—pressed down and running over?"

Diana smiled, and said nothing. She had delighted in the encounter; so, in spite of castigation, had he. There surged up in him a happy excited consciousness of quickened life and hurrying hours. He looked with distaste at the nearness of the house; and at the group

of figures which had paused in front of them, waiting for them, on the farther edge of the broad lawn.

"You have convicted me of an odious, exclusive, bullying temper—or you think you have—and all you will allow *me* in the way of victory is that I got the best of it because Captain Roughsedge wasn't there!"

"Not at all. I respect your critical faculty!"

"You wish to hear me gush like Mrs. Minchin. It is simply astounding the number of people you like!"

Diana's laugh broke into a sigh.

"Perhaps it's like a hungry boy in a goody-shop. He wants to eat them all."

"Were you so very solitary as a child?" he asked her, gently, in a changed tone, which was itself an act of homage, almost a caress.

"Yes—I was very solitary," she said, after a pause. "And I am really gregarious—dreadfully fond of people! —and curious about them. And I think, oddly enough, papa was too."

A question rose naturally to his lips, but was checked unspoken. He well remembered Mr. Mallory at Portofino; a pleasant courteous man, evidently by nature a man of the world, interested in affairs and in literature, with all the signs on him of the English governing class. It was certainly curious that he should have spent all those years in exile with his child, in a remote villa on the Italian coast. Health, Marsham supposed, or finance —the two chief motives of life. For himself, the thought of Diana's childhood between the pine woods and the sea gave him pleasure; it added another to the poetical and romantic ideas which she suggested. There came back on him the plash of the waves beneath the Portofino headland, the murmur of the pines, the fragrance of the

underwood. He felt the kindred between all these, and her maidenly energy, her unspoiled beauty.

"One moment!" he said, as they began to cross the lawn. "Has my sister attacked you yet?"

The smile with which the words were spoken could be heard though not seen. Diana laughed, a little awkwardly.

"I am afraid Mrs. Fotheringham thinks me a child of blood and thunder! I am so sorry!"

"If she presses you too hard, call me in. Isabel and I understand each other."

Diana murmured something polite.

Mr. Frobisher meanwhile came to meet them with a remark upon the beauty of the evening, and Alicia Drake followed.

"I expect you found it a horrid long way," she said to Diana. Diana disclaimed fatigue.

"You came *so* slowly, we thought you must be tired."

Something in the drawling manner and the slightly insolent expression made the words sting. Diana hurried on to Marion Vincent's side. That lady was leaning on a stick, and for the first time Diana saw that she was slightly lame. She looked up with a pleasant smile and greeting; but before they could move on across the ample drive, Mr. Frobisher overtook them.

"Won't you take my arm?" he said, in a low voice.

Miss Vincent slipped her hand inside his arm, and rested on him. He supported her with what seemed to Diana a tender carefulness, his head bent to hers, while he talked and she replied.

Diana followed, her girl's heart kindling.

"Surely!—surely!—they are in love?—engaged?"

But no one else appeared to take any notice or made any remark.

Long did the memory of the evening which followed live warm in the heart of Diana. It was to her an evening of triumph—triumph innocent, harmless, and complete. Her charm, her personality had by now captured the whole party, save for an opposition of three—and the three realized that they had for the moment no chance of influencing the popular voice. The rugged face of Mr. Barton stiffened as she approached; it seemed to him that the night before he had been snubbed by a chit, and he was not the man to forget it easily. Alicia Drake was a little pale and a little silent during the evening, till, late in its course, she succeeded in carrying off a group of young men who had come for the shoot and were staying the night, and in establishing a noisy court among them Mrs. Fotheringham disapproved, by now, of almost everything that concerned Miss Mallory: of her taste in music or in books, of the touch of effusion in her manner, which was of course "affected" or "aristocratic"; of the enthusiasms she did *not* possess, no less than of those she did. On the sacred subject of the suffrage, for instance, which with Mrs. Fotheringham was a matter for propaganda everywhere and at all times, Diana was but a cracked cymbal, when struck she gave back either no sound at all, or a wavering one. Her beautiful eyes were blank or hostile; she would escape like a fawn from the hunter. As for other politics, no one but Mrs. Fotheringham dreamed of introducing them. She, however, would have discovered many ways of dragging them in, and of setting down Diana; but here her brother was on the watch, and time after time she found herself checked or warded off.

Diana, indeed, was well defended. The more ill-humored Mrs. Fotheringham grew, the more Lady Niton

enjoyed the evening and her own "Nitonisms." It was she who after dinner suggested the clearing of the hall and an impromptu dance—on the ground that "girls must waltz for their living." And when Diana proved to be one of those in whom dancing is a natural and shining gift, so that even the gilded youths of the party, who were perhaps inclined to fight shy of Miss Mallory as "a girl who talked clever," even they came crowding about her, like flies about a milk-pail—it was Lady Niton who drew Isabel Fotheringham's attention to it loudly and repeatedly. It was she also who, at a pause in the dancing and at a hint from Mrs. Colwood, insisted on making Diana sing, to the grand piano which had been pushed into a corner of the hall. And when the singing, helped by the looks and personality of the singer, had added to the girl's success, Lady Niton sat fanning herself in reflected triumph, appealing to the spectators on all sides for applause. The topics that Diana fled from, Lady Niton took up; and when Mrs. Fotheringham, bewildered by an avalanche of words, would say—"Give me time, please, Lady Niton—I must think!"—Lady Niton would reply, coolly—"Not unless you're accustomed to it"; while she finally capped her misdeeds by insisting that it was no good to say Mr. Barton had a warm heart if he were without that much more useful possession—a narrow mind.

Thus buttressed and befriended on almost all sides, Diana drank her cup of pleasure. Once in an interval between two dances, as she passed on Oliver Marsham's arm, close to Lady Lucy, that lady put up her frail old hand, and gently touched Diana's. "Do not overtire yourself, my dear!" she said, with effusion; and Oliver, looking down, knew very well what his mother's rare

effusion meant, if Diana did not. On several occasions Mr. Ferrier sought her out, with every mark of flattering attention, while it often seemed to Diana as if the protecting kindness of Sir James Chide was never far away. In her white *ingenue's* dress she was an embodiment of youth, simplicity, and joy, such as perhaps our grandmothers knew more commonly than we, in our more hurried and complex day. And at the same time there floated round her something more than youth—something more thrilling and challenging than mere girlish delight—an effluence, a passion, a "swell of soul," which made this dawn of her life more bewitching even for its promise than for its performance.

For Marsham, too, the hours flew. He was carried away, enchanted; he had eyes for no one, time for no one but Diana; and before the end of the evening the gossip among the Tallyn guests ran fast and free. When at last the dance broke up, many a curious eye watched the parting between Marsham and Diana; and in their bedroom on the top floor Lady Lucy's two nieces sat up till the small hours discussing, first, the situation—was Oliver really caught at last?—and then, Alicia's refusal to discuss it. She had said bluntly that she was dog-tired—and shut her door upon them.

On a hint from his mother, Marsham went to say good-night to her in her room. She threw her arms round his neck, whispering: "Dear Oliver!—dear Oliver!—I just wished you to know—if it is as I think—that you had my blessing."

He drew back, a little shrinking and reluctant—yet still flushed, as it were, with the last rays Diana's sun had shed upon him.

"Things mustn't be hurried, mother."

"No—no—they sha'n't. But you know how I have wished to see you happy—how ambitious I have been for you!"

"Yes, mother, I know. You have been always very good to me." He had recovered his composure, and stood holding her hand and smiling at her.

"What a charming creature, Oliver! It is a pity, of course. her father has indoctrinated her with those opinions, but—"

"Opinions!" he said, scornfully—"what do they matter!" But he could not discuss Diana. His blood was still too hot within him.

"Of course—of course!" said Lady Lucy, soothingly. "She is so young—she will develop. But what a wife, Oliver, she will make—how she might help a man on—with her talents and her beauty and her refinement. She has such dignity, too, for her years."

He made no reply, except to repeat:

"Don't hurry it, mother—don't hurry it."

"No—no"—she said, laughing—"I am not such a fool. There will be many natural opportunities of meeting."

"There are some difficulties with the Vavasours. They have been disagreeable about the gardens. Ferrier and I have promised to go over and advise her."

"Good!" said Lady Lucy, delighted that the Vavasours had been disagreeable. "Good-night, my son, good-night!"

A minute later Oliver stood meditating in his own room, where he had just donned his smoking-jacket. By one of the natural ironies of life, at a moment when he was more in love than he had ever been yet, he was,

nevertheless, thinking eagerly of prospects and of money. Owing to his peculiar relation to his mother, and his father's estate, marriage would be to him no mere satisfaction of a personal passion. It would be a vital incident in a politician's career, to whom larger means and greater independence were now urgently necessary. To marry with his mother's full approval would at last bring about that provision for himself which his father's will had most unjustly postponed. He was monstrously dependent upon her. It had been one of the chief checks on a strong and concentrated ambition. But Lady Lucy had long made him understand that to marry according to her wishes would mean emancipation: a much larger income in the present, and the final settlement of her will in his favor. It was amazing how she had taken to Diana! Diana had only to accept him, and his future was secured.

But though thoughts of this kind passed in tumultuous procession through the grooves of consciousness, they were soon expelled by others. Marsham was no mere interested schemer. Diana should help him to his career; but above all and before all she was the adorable brown-eyed creature, whose looks had just been shining upon him, whose soft hand had just been lingering in his! As he stood alone and spellbound in the dark, yielding himself to the surging waves of feeling which broke over his mind, the thought, the dream, of holding Diana Mallory in his arms—of her head against his breast—came upon him with a sudden and stinging delight.

Yet the delight was under control—the control of a keen and practical intelligence. There rose in him a sharp sense of the unfathomed depths and possibilities in such a nature as Diana's. Once or twice that evening,

through all her sweet forthcomingness, when he had forced the note a little, she had looked at him in sudden surprise or shrinking. No!—nothing premature! It seemed to him, as it had seemed to Bobbie Forbes, that she could only be won by the slow and gradual conquest of a rich personality. He set himself to the task.

Down-stairs Mr. Ferrier and Sir James Chide were sitting together in a remote corner of the hall. Mr. Ferrier, in great good-humor with the state of things, was discussing Oliver's chances, confidentially, with his old friend. Sir James sat smoking in silence. He listened to Ferrier's praises of Miss Mallory, to his generous appreciation of Marsham's future, to his speculations as to what Lady Lucy would do for her son, upon his marriage, or as to the part which a creature so brilliant and so winning as Diana might be expected to play in London and in political life.

Sir James said little or nothing. He knew Lady Lucy well, and had known her long. Presently he rose abruptly and went up-stairs to bed.

"Ought I to speak?" he asked himself, in an agony of doubt. "Perhaps a word to Ferrier?—"

No!—impossible!—impossible! Yet, as he mounted the stairs, over the house which had just seen the triumph of Diana, over that radiant figure itself, the second sight of the great lawyer perceived the brooding of a cloud of fate; nor could he do anything to avert or soften its downfall.

Meanwhile Diana's golden hour had found an unexpected epilogue. After her good-night to Marsham she was walking along the gallery corridor going toward her

room, when she perceived Miss Vincent in front of her moving slowly and, as it seemed, with difficulty. A sudden impulse made Diana fly after her.

"Do let me help you!" she said, shyly.

Marion Vincent smiled, and put her hand in the girl's arm.

"How do people manage to live at all in these big houses, and with dinner-parties every night!" she said, laughing. "After a day in the East End I am never half so tired."

She was indeed so pale that Diana was rather frightened, and remembering that in the afternoon she had seen Miss Vincent descend from an upper floor, she offered a rest in her own room, which was close by, before the evidently lame woman attempted further stairs.

Marion Vincent hesitated a moment, then accepted. Diana hurried up a chair to the fire, installed her there, and herself sat on the floor watching her guest with some anxiety.

Yet, as she did so, she felt a certain antagonism. The face, of which the eyes were now closed, was nobly grave. The expression of its deeply marked lines appealed to her heart. But why this singularity—this eccentricity? Miss Vincent wore the same dress of dark woollen stuff, garnished with white frills, in which she had appeared the night before, and her morning attire, as Mr. Frobisher had foretold, had consisted of a precisely similar garment, adorned with a straight collar instead of frills. Surely a piece of acting!—of unnecessary self-assertion!

Yet all through the day—and the evening—Diana had been conscious of this woman's presence, in a strange penetrating way, even when they had had least to do with each other. In the intervals of her own joyous

progress she had been often aware of Miss Vincent sitting apart, sometimes with Mr. Frobisher, who was reading or talking to her, sometimes with Lady Lucy, and—during the dance—with John Barton. Barton might have been the Jeremiah or the Ezekiel of the occasion. He sat astride upon a chair, in his respectable workman's clothes, his eyes under their shaggy brows, his weather-beaten features and compressed lips expressing an ill-concealed contempt for the scene before him. It was rumored that he had wished to depart before dinner, having concluded his consultation with Mr. Ferrier, but that Mrs. Fotheringham had persuaded him to remain for the night. His presence seemed to make dancing a misdemeanor, and the rich house, with its services and appurtenances, an organized crime. But if his personality was the storm-point of the scene, charged with potential lightning, Marion Vincent's was the still small voice, without threat or bitterness, which every now and then spoke to a quick imagination like Diana's its message from a world of poverty and pain. And sometimes Diana had been startled by the perception that the message seemed to be specially for her. Miss Vincent's eyes followed her; whenever Diana passed near her, she smiled—she admired. But always, as it seemed to Diana, with a meaning behind the smile. Yet what that meaning might be the girl could not tell.

At last, as she watched her, Marion Vincent looked up.

"Mr. Barton would talk to me just now about the history of his own life. I suppose it was the dance and the supper excited him. He began to testify! Sometimes when he does that he is magnificent. He said some fine things to-night. But I am run down and couldn't stand it."

Diana asked if Mr. Barton had himself gone through a great struggle with poverty.

"The usual struggle. No more than thousands of others. Only in him it is vocal—he can reflect upon it. —You had an easy triumph over him last night," she added, with a smile, turning to her companion.

"Who wouldn't have?" cried Diana. "What outrageous things he said!"

"He doesn't know much about India—or the Colonies. He hasn't travelled; he reads very little. He showed badly. But on his own subjects he is good enough. I have known him impress or convert the most unlikely people—by nothing but a bare sincerity. Just now—while the servants were handing champagne—he and I were standing a little way off under the gallery. His eyes are weak, and he can't bear the glare of all these lights. Suddenly he told me the story of his father's death."

She paused, and drew her hand across her eyes. Diana saw that they were wet. But although startled, the girl held herself a little aloof and erect, as though ready at a moment's notice to defend herself against a softening which might involve a treachery to glorious and sacred things.

"It so chanced"—Miss Vincent resumed—"that it had a bearing on experiences of my own—just now."

"You are living in the East End?"

"At present. I am trying to find out the causes of a great wave of poverty and unemployment in a particular district."—She named it.—"It is hard work—and not particularly good for the nerves."

She smiled, but at the same moment she turned extremely white, and as she fell back in her chair, Diana

saw her clinch her hand as though in a strong effort for physical self-control.

Diana sprang up.

"Let me get you some water!"

"Don't go. Don't tell anybody. Just open that window." Diana obeyed, and the northwest wind, sweeping in, seemed to revive her pale companion almost at once.

"I am very sorry!" said Miss Vincent, after a few minutes, in her natural voice. "Now I am all right." She drank some water, and looked up.

"Shall I tell you the story he told me? It is very short, and it might change your view of him."

"If you feel able—if you are strong enough," said Diana, uncomfortably, wondering why it should matter to Miss Vincent or anybody else what view she might happen to take of Mr. Barton.

"He said he remembered his father (who was a house-painter—a very decent and hard-working man) having been out of work for eight weeks. He used to go out looking for work every day—and there was the usual story, of course, of pawning or selling all their possessions —odd jobs—increasing starvation—and so on. Meanwhile, *his* only pleasure—he was ten—was to go with his sister after school to look at two shops in the East India Dock Road—one a draper's with a 'Christmas Bazaar' —the other a confectioner's. He declares it made him not more starved, but less, to look at the goodies and the cakes; they *imagined* eating them; but they were both too sickly, he thinks, to be really hungry. As for the bazaar, with its dolls and toys, and its Father Christmas, and bright lights, they both thought it paradise. They used to flatten their noses against the glass; sometimes a

shopman drove them away; but they came back and back. At last the iron shutters would come down—slowly. Then he and his sister would stoop—and stoop—to get a last look. Presently there would be only a foot of bliss left; then they both sank down flat on their stomachs on the pavement, and so stayed—greedily—till all was dark, and paradise had been swallowed up. Well, one night, the show had been specially gorgeous; they took hands afterward, and ran home. Their father had just come in. Mr. Barton can remember his staggering into the room. I'll give it in his words. 'Mother, have you got anything in the house?' 'Nothing, Tom.' And mother began to cry. 'Not a bit of bread, mother?' 'I gave the last bit to the children for their teas.' Father said nothing, but he lay down on the bed. Then he called me. 'Johnnie,' he said, 'I've got work—for next week—but I sha'n't never go to it—it's too late,' and then he asked me to hold his hand, and turned his face on the pillow. When my mother came to look, he was dead. 'Starvation and exhaustion'—the doctor said."

Marion Vincent paused.

"It's just like any other story of the kind—isn't it?" Her smile turned on Diana. "The charitable societies and missions send them out by scores in their appeals. But somehow as he told it just now, down-stairs, in that glaring hall, with the champagne going round—it seemed intolerable."

"And you mean also"—said Diana, slowly—"that a man with that history can't know or care very much about the Empire?"

"Our minds are all picture-books," said the woman beside her, in a low, dreamy voice: "it depends upon

what the pictures are. To you the words 'England'—and the 'Empire'—represent one set of pictures—all bright and magnificent—like the Christmas Bazaar. To John Barton and me"—she smiled—"they represent another. We too have seen the lights, and the candles, and the toys; we have admired them, as you have; but we know the reality is not there. The reality is in the dark streets, where men tramp, looking for work; it is in the rooms where their wives and children live stifled and hungry—the rooms where our working folk die—without having lived."

Her eyes, above her pale cheeks, had opened to their fullest extent—the eyes of a seer. They held Diana. So did the voice, which was the voice of one in whom tragic passion and emotion are forever wearing away the physical frame, as the sea waves break down a crumbling shore.

Suddenly Diana bent over her, and took her hands.

"I wonder why you thought me worth talking to like this?" she said, impetuously.

"I liked you!" said Marion Vincent, simply. "I liked you as you talked last night. Only I wanted to add some more pictures to your picture-book. *Your* set — the popular one—is called *The Glories of England.* There is another—I recommend it to you: *The Shames of England.*"

"You think poverty a disgrace?" murmured Diana, held by the glowing fanatical look of the speaker.

"*Our* poverty is a disgrace—the life of our poor is a disgrace. What does the Empire matter—what do Afghan campaigns matter—while London is rotten? However" (she smiled again, and caressed Diana's hand), "will you make friends with me?"

"Is it worth while for you?" said Diana, laughing. "I shall always prefer my picture-book to yours, I am afraid. And—I am not poor—and I don't give all my money away."

Miss Vincent surveyed her gayly.

"Well, I come here," (she looked significantly round the luxurious room), "and I am very good friends with the Marshams. Oliver Marsham is one of the persons from whom I hope most."

"Not in pulling down wealth—and property!" cried Diana.

"Why not? Every revolution has its Philippe Égalité. Oh, it will come slowly—it will come slowly," said the other, quietly. "And of course there will be tragedy—there always is—in everything. But not, I hope, for you—never for you!" And once more her hand dropped softly on Diana's.

"You were happy to-night?—you enjoyed the dance?"

The question, so put, with such a look, from another mouth, would have been an impertinence. Diana shrank, but could not resent it. Yet, against her will, she flushed deeply.

"Yes. It was delightful. I did not expect to enjoy it so much, but—"

"But you did! That's well. That's good!"

Marion Vincent rose feebly. And as she stood, leaning on the chair, she touched the folds of Diana's white dress.

"When shall I see you again?—and that dress?"

"I shall be in London in May," said Diana, eagerly—"May I come then? You must tell me where."

"Ah, you won't come to Bethnal Green in that dress. What a pity!"

Diana helped her to her room, where they shook hands and parted. Then Diana came back to her own quarters. She had put out the electric light for Miss Vincent's sake. The room was lit only by the fire. In the full-length mirror of the toilet-table Diana saw her own white reflection, and the ivy leaves in her hair. The absence of her mourning was first a pain; then the joy of the evening surged up again. Oh, was it wrong, was it wrong to be happy—in this world "where men sit and hear each other groan"? She clasped her hands to her soft breast, as though defending the warmth, the hope that were springing there, against any dark protesting force that might threaten to take them from her.

CHAPTER VI

"HENRY," said Mrs. Roughsedge to her husband, "I think it would do you good to walk to Beechcote."

"No, my dear, no! I have many proofs to get through before dinner. Take Hugh. Only—"

Dr. Roughsedge, smiling, held up a beckoning finger. His wife approached.

"Don't let him fall in love with that young woman. It's no good."

"Well, she must marry somebody, Henry."

"Big fishes mate with big fishes — minnows with minnows."

"Don't run down your own son, sir. Who, pray, is too good for him?"

"The world is divided into wise men, fools, and mothers. The characters of the first two are mingled—disproportionately—in the last," said Dr. Roughsedge, patiently enduring the kiss his wife inflicted on him. "Don't kiss me, Patricia—don't tread on my proofs—go away—and tell Jane not to forget my tea because you have gone out."

Mrs. Roughsedge departed, and the doctor, who was devoted to her, sank at once into that disorderly welter of proofs and smoke which represented to him the best of the day. The morning he reserved for hard work, and during the course of it he smoked but one pipe. A

quotation from Fuller which was often on his lips expressed his point of view: "Spill not the morning, which is the quintessence of the day, in recreation. For sleep itself is a recreation. And to open the morning thereto is to add sauce to sauce."

But in the afternoon he gave himself to all the delightful bye-tasks: the works of supererogation, the excursions into side paths, the niggling with proofs, the toying with style, the potterings and polishings, the ruminations, and rewritings and refinements which make the joy of the man of letters. For five-and-twenty years he had been a busy Cambridge coach, tied year in and year out to the same strictness of hours, the same monotony of subjects, the same patient drumming on thick heads and dull brains. Now that was all over. A brother had left him a little money; he had saved the rest. At sixty he had begun to live. He was editing a series of reprints for the Cambridge University Press, and what mortal man could want more than a good wife and son, a cottage to live in, a fair cook, unlimited pipes, no debts, and the best of English literature to browse in? The rural afternoon, especially, when he smoked and grubbed and divagated as he pleased, was alone enough to make the five-and-twenty years of "swink" worth while.

Mrs. Roughsedge stayed to give very particular orders to the house-parlormaid about the doctor's tea, to open a window in the tiny drawing-room, and to put up in brown paper a pair of bed-socks that she had just finished knitting for an old man in one of the parish-houses. Then she joined her son, who was already waiting for her—impatiently—in the garden.

Hugh Roughsedge had only just returned from a month's stay in London, made necessary by those new

Army examinations which his soul detested. By dint of strenuous coaching he had come off moderately victorious, and had now returned home for a week's extra leave before rejoining his regiment. One of the first questions on his tongue, as his mother instantly noticed, had been a question as to Miss Mallory. Was she still at Beechcote? Had his mother seen anything of her?

Yes, she was still at Beechcote. Mrs. Roughsedge, however, had seen her but seldom and slightly since her son's departure for London. If she had made one or two observations from a distance, with respect to the young lady, she withheld them. And like the discerning mother that she was, at the very first opportunity she proposed a call at Beechcote.

On their way thither, this February afternoon, they talked in a desultory way about some new War-Office reforms, which, as usual, the entire Army believed to be merely intended—wilfully and deliberately—for its destruction; about a recent gambling scandal in the regiment, or the peculiarities of Hugh's commanding officer. Meanwhile he held his peace on the subject of some letters he had received that morning. There was to be an expedition in Nigeria. Officers were wanted; and he had volunteered. The result of his application was not yet known. He had no intention whatever of upsetting his parents till it was known.

"I wonder how Miss Mallory liked Tallyn," said Mrs. Roughsedge, briskly.

She had already expressed the same wonder once or twice. But as neither she nor her son had any materials for deciding the point the remark hardly promoted conversation. She added to it another of more effect.

"The Miss Bertrams have already made up their minds that she is to marry Oliver Marsham."

"The deuce!" cried the startled Roughsedge. "Beg your pardon, mother, but how can those old cats possibly know?"

"They can't know," said Mrs. Roughsedge, placidly. "But as soon as you get a young woman like that into the neighborhood, of course everybody begins to speculate."

"They mumble any fresh person, like a dog with a bone," said Roughsedge, indignantly.

They were passing across the broad village street. On either hand were old timbered cottages, sun-mellowed and rain-beaten; a thatched roof showing here and there; or a bit of mean new building, breaking the time-worn line. To their left, keeping watch over the graves which encircled it, rose the fourteenth-century church; amid the trees around it rooks were cawing and wheeling; and close beneath it huddled other cottages, ivy-grown, about the village well. Afternoon school was just over, and the children were skipping and running about the streets. Through the cottage doors could be seen occasionally the gleam of a fire or a white cloth spread for tea. For the womenfolk, at least, tea was the great meal of the day in Beechcote. So that what with the flickering of the fires, and the sunset light on the windows, the skipping children, the dogs, the tea-tables, and the rooks, Beechcote wore a cheerful and idyllic air. But Mrs. Roughsedge knew too much about these cottages. In this one to the left a girl had just borne her second illegitimate child; in that one farther on were two mentally deficient children, the offspring of feeble-minded parents; in the next, an old woman, the victim of

pernicious anæmia, was moaning her life away; in the last to the right the mother of five small children had just died in her sixth confinement. Mrs. Roughsedge gave a long sigh as she looked at it. The tragedy was but forty-eight hours old; she had sat up with the mother through her dying hours.

"Oh, my dear!" said Mrs. Roughsedge, suddenly—"here comes the Vicar. Do you know, it's so unlucky—and so strange!—but he has certainly taken a dislike to Miss Mallory—I believe it was because he had hoped some Christian Socialist friends of his would have taken Beechcote, and he was disappointed to find it let to some one with what he calls "silly Tory notions" and no particular ideas about Church matters. Now there's a regular fuss—something about the Book Club. I don't understand—"

The Vicar advanced toward them. He came along at a great pace, his lean figure closely sheathed in his long clerical coat, his face a little frowning and set.

At the sight of Mrs. Roughsedge he drew up, and greeted the mother and son.

"May I have a few words with you?" he asked Mrs. Roughsedge, as he turned back with them toward the Beechcote lane. "I don't know whether you are acquainted, Mrs. Roughsedge, with what has just happened in the Book Club, to which we both belong?"

The Book Club was a village institution of some antiquity. It embraced some ten families, who drew up their Mudie lists in common and sent the books from house to house. The Vicar and Dr. Roughsedge had been till now mainly responsible for these lists—so far, at least, as "serious books" were concerned, the ladies being allowed the chief voice in the novels.

Mrs. Roughsedge, a little fluttered, asked for information.

"Miss Mallory has recommended two books which, in my opinion, should not be circulated among us," said the Vicar. "I have protested—in vain. Miss Mallory maintains her recommendation. I propose, therefore, to withdraw from the Club."

"Are they improper?" cried Mrs. Roughsedge, much distressed. Captain Roughsedge threw an angry look first at his mother and then at the Vicar.

"Not in the usual sense," said the Vicar, stiffly—"but highly improper for the reading of Christian people. One is by a Unitarian, and the other reproduces some of the worst speculations of an infidel German theology. I pointed out the nature of the books to Miss Mallory. She replied that they were both by authors whom her father liked. I regretted it. Then she fired up, refused to withdraw the names, and offered to resign. Miss Mallory's subscription to the Club is, however, much larger than mine. *I* shall therefore resign—protesting, of course, against the reason which induces me to take this course."

"What's wrong with the books?" asked Hugh Roughsedge.

The Vicar drew himself up.

"I have given my reasons."

"Why, you see that kind of thing in every newspaper," said Roughsedge, bluntly.

"All the more reason why I should endeavor to keep my parish free from it," was the Vicar's resolute reply. "However, there is no more to be said. I wished Mrs. Roughsedge to understand what had happened—that is all."

He paused, and offered a limp hand in good-bye.

"Let me speak to Miss Mallory," said Mrs. Roughsedge, soothingly.

The Vicar shook his head.

"She is a young lady of strong will." And with a hasty nod of farewell to the Captain, whose hostility he divined, he walked away.

"And what about obstinate and pig-headed parsons!" said Roughsedge, hotly, addressing his remark, however, safely to the Vicar's back, and to his mother. "Who makes him a judge of what we shall read! I shall make a point of asking for both the books!"

"Oh, my dear Hugh!" cried his mother, in rather troubled protest. Then she happily reflected that if he asked for them, he was not in the least likely to read them. "I hope Miss Mallory is not really an unbeliever."

"Mother! Of course, what that poker in a wideawake did was to say something uncivil about her father, and she wasn't going to stand that. Quite right, too."

"She did come to church on Christmas Day," said Mrs. Roughsedge, reflecting. "But, then, a great many people do that who don't believe anything. Anyway, she has always been quite charming to your father and me. And I think, besides, the Vicar might have been satisfied with your father's opinion—*he* made no complaint about the books. Oh, now the Miss Bertrams are going to stop us! They'll of course know all about it!"

If Captain Roughsedge growled ugly words into his mustache, his mother was able to pretend not to hear them, in the gentle excitement of shaking hands with the Miss Bertrams. These middle-aged ladies, the daughters

of a deceased doctor from the neighboring county town of Dunscombe, were, if possible, more plainly dressed than usual, and their manners more forbidding.

"You will have heard of this disagreeable incident which has occurred," said Miss Maria to Mrs. Roughsedge, with a pinched mouth. "My sister and I shall, of course, remove our names from the Club."

"I say—don't your subscribers order the books they like?" asked Roughsedge, half wroth and half laughing, surveying the lady with his hand on his side.

"There is a very clear understanding among us," said Miss Maria, sharply, "as to the character of the books to be ordered. No member of the Club has yet transgressed it."

"There must be give and take, mustn't there?" said Miss Elizabeth, in a deprecatory voice. She was the more amiable and the weaker of the two sisters. "*We* should *never* order books that would be offensive to Miss Mallory."

"But if you haven't read the books?"

"The Vicar's word is quite enough," said Miss Maria, with her most determined air.

They all moved on together, Captain Roughsedge smoothing or tugging at his mustache with a restless hand.

But Miss Bertram, presently, dropping a little behind, drew Mrs. Roughsedge with her.

"There are all sorts of changes at the house," she said, confidentially. "The laundry maids are allowed to go out every evening, if they like—and Miss Mallory makes no attempt to influence the servants to come to church. The Vicar says the seats for the Beechcote servants have never been so empty."

"Dear, dear!" murmured Mrs. Roughsedge.

"And money is improperly given away. Several people whom the Vicar thinks most unfit objects of charity have been assisted. And in a conversation with her last week Miss Mallory expressed herself in a very sad way about foreign missions. Her father's idea, again, no doubt—but it is all very distressing. The Vicar doubts" —Miss Maria spoke warily, bringing her face very close to the gray curls—"whether she has ever been confirmed."

This final stroke, however, fell flat. Mrs. Roughsedge showed no emotion. "Most of my aunts," she said, stoutly, "were never confirmed, and they were good Christians and communicants all their lives."

Miss Maria's expression showed that this reference to a preceding barbaric age of the Church had no relevance to the existing order of things.

"Of course," she added, hastily, "I do not wish to make myself troublesome or conspicuous in any way. I merely mention these things as explaining why the Vicar felt bound to make a stand. The Church feeling in this parish has been so strong it would, indeed, be a pity if anything occurred to weaken it."

Mrs. Roughsedge gave a doubtful assent. As to the Church feeling, she was not so clear as Miss Bertram. One of her chief friends was a secularist cobbler who lived under the very shadow of the church. The Miss Bertrams shuddered at his conversation. Mrs. Roughsedge found him racy company, and he presented to her aspects of village life and opinion with which the Miss Bertrams were not at all acquainted.

As the mother and son approached the old house in the sunset light, its aspect of mellow and intimate congruity

with the woods and fields about it had never been more winning. The red, gray, and orange of its old brickwork played into the brown and purples of its engirdling trees, into the lilacs and golds and crimsons of the western sky behind it, into the cool and quiet tones of the meadows from which it rose. A spirit of beauty had been at work fusing man's perishable and passing work with Nature's eternal masterpiece; so that the old house had in it something immortal, and the light which played upon it something gently personal, relative, and fleeting. Winter was still dominant; a northeast wind blew. But on the grass under the spreading oaks which sheltered the eastern front a few snow-drops were out. And Diana was gathering them.

She came toward her visitors with alacrity. "Oh! what a long time since you have been to see me!"

Mrs. Roughsedge explained that she had been entertaining some relations, and Hugh had been in London. She hoped that Miss Mallory had enjoyed her stay at Tallyn. It certainly seemed to both mother and son that the ingenuous young face colored a little as its owner replied—"Thank you—it was very amusing"—and then added, with a little hesitation—"Mr. Marsham has been kindly advising me since, about the gardens—and the Vavasours. *They* were to keep up the gardens, you know—and now they practically leave it to me—which isn't fair."

Mrs. Roughsedge secretly wondered whether this statement was meant to account for the frequent presence of Oliver Marsham at Beechcote. She had herself met him in the lane riding away from Beechcote no less than three times during the past fortnight.

"Please come in to tea!" said Diana; "I am just ex-

pecting my cousin—Miss Merton. Mrs. Colwood and I are so excited!—we have never had a visitor here before. I came out to try and find some snow-drops for her room. There is really nothing in the greenhouses—and I can't make the house look nice."

Certainly as they entered and passed through the panelled hall to the drawing-room Hugh Roughsedge saw no need for apology. Amid the warm dimness of the house he was aware of a few starry flowers, a few gleaming and beautiful stuffs, the white and black of an engraving, or the blurred golds and reds of an old Italian picture, humble school-work perhaps, collected at small cost by Diana's father, yet still breathing the magic of the Enchanted Land. The house was refined, pleading, eager—like its mistress. It made no display—but it admitted no vulgarity. "These things are not here for mere decoration's sake," it seemed to say. "Dear kind hands have touched them; dear silent voices have spoken of them. Love them a little, you also!—and be at home."

Not that Hugh Roughsedge made any such conscious analysis of his impressions. Yet the house appealed to him strangely. He thought Miss Mallory's taste marvellous; and it is one of the superiorities in women to which men submit most readily.

The drawing-room had especially a festive air. Mrs. Colwood was keeping tea-cakes hot, and building up a blazing fire with logs of beech-wood. When she had seated her guests, Diana put the snow-drops she had gathered into an empty vase, and looked round her happily, as though now she had put the last touch to all her preparations. She talked readily of her cousin's coming to Mrs. Roughsedge; and she inquired minutely

of Hugh when the next meet was to be, that she might take her guest to see it.

"Fanny will be just as new to it all as I!" she said. "That's so nice, isn't it?" Then she offered Mrs. Roughsedge cake, and looked at her askance with a hanging head. "Have you heard—about the Vicar?"

Mrs. Roughsedge admitted it.

"I did lose my temper," said Diana, repentantly. "But *really!*—papa used to tell me it was a sign of weakness to say violent things you couldn't prove. Wasn't it Lord Shaftesbury that said some book he didn't like was "vomited out of the jaws of hell"? Well, the Vicar said things very like that. He did indeed!"

"Oh no, my dear, no!" cried Mrs. Roughsedge, disturbed by the quotation, even, of such a remark. Hugh Roughsedge grinned. Diana, however, insisted.

"Of course, I would have given them up. Only I just happened to say that papa always read everything he could by those two men—and then"—she flushed—"Well, I don't exactly remember what Mr. Lavery said. But I know that when he'd said it I wouldn't have given up either of those books for the world!"

"I hope, Miss Mallory, you won't think of giving them up," said Hugh, with vigor. "It will be an excellent thing for Lavery."

Mrs. Roughsedge, as the habitual peacemaker of the village, said hastily that Dr. Roughsedge should talk to the Vicar. Of course, he must not be allowed to do anything so foolish as to withdraw from the Club, or the Miss Bertrams either."

"Oh! my goodness," cried Diana, hiding her face—and then raising it, crimson. "The Miss Bertrams, too!

Why, it's only six weeks since I first came to this place, and now I'm setting it by the ears!"

Her aspect of mingled mirth and dismay had in it something so childish and disarming that Mrs. Roughsedge could only wish the Vicar had been there to see. His heretical parishioner fell into meditation.

"What can I do? If I could only be sure that he would never say things like that to me again—"

"But he will!" said Captain Roughsedge. "Don't give in, Miss Mallory."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Roughsedge, as the door opened, "shall we ask Mr. Marsham?"

Diana turned with a startled movement. It was evident that Marsham was not expected. But Mrs. Roughsedge also inferred from a shrewd observation of her hostess that he was not unwelcome. He had, in fact, looked in on his way home from hunting to give a message from his mother; that, at least, was the pretext. Hugh Roughsedge, reading him with a hostile eye, said to himself that if it hadn't been Lady Lucy it would have been something else. As it happened, he was quite as well aware as his mother that Marsham's visits to Beechcote of late had been far more frequent than mere neighborliness required.

Marsham was in hunting dress, and made his usual handsome and energetic impression. Diana treated him with great self-possession, asking after Mr. Ferrier, who had just returned to Tallyn for the last fortnight before the opening of Parliament, and betraying to the Roughsedges that she was already on intimate terms with Lady Lucy, who was lending her patterns for her embroidery, driving over once or twice a week, and advising her about various household affairs. Mrs. Roughsedge, who had

been Diana's first protector, saw herself supplanted—not without a little natural chagrin.

The controversy of the moment was submitted to Marsham, who decided hotly against the Vicar, and implored Diana to stand firm. But somehow his intervention only hastened the compunction that had already begun to work in her. She followed the Roughsedges to the door when they departed.

"What must I do?" she said, sheepishly, to Mrs. Roughsedge. "Write to him?"

"The Vicar? Oh, dear Miss Mallory, the doctor will settle it. You *would* change the books?"

"Mother!" cried Hugh Roughsedge, indignantly, "we're all bullied—you know we are—and now you want Miss Mallory bullied too."

"'Who would be free, themselves must strike the blow,'" laughed Marsham, in the background, as he stood toying with his tea beside Mrs. Colwood.

Diana shook her head.

"I can't be friends with him," she said, naïvely, "for a long long time. But I'll rewrite my list. And *must* I go and call on the Miss Bertrams to-morrow?"

Her mock and smiling submission, as she stood, slender and lovely, amid the shadows of the hall, seemed to Hugh Roughsedge, as he looked back upon her, the prettiest piece of acting. Then she turned, and he knew that she was going back to Marsham. At the same moment he saw Mrs. Colwood's little figure disappearing up the main stairway. Frowning and silent, he followed his mother out of the house.

Diana looked round rather wistfully for Mrs. Colwood as she re-entered the room; but that lady had many letters to write.

Marsham noticed Mrs. Colwood's retreat with a thrill of pleasure. Yet even now he had no immediate declaration in his mind. The course that he had marked out for himself had been exactly followed. There had been no "hurrying it." Only in these weeks before Parliament, while matters of great moment to his own political future were going forward, and his participation in them was not a whit less cool and keen than it had always been, he had still found abundant time for the wooing of Diana. He had assumed a kind of guardian's attitude in the matter of her relations to the Vavasours—who in business affairs had proved both greedy and muddle-headed; he had flattered her woman's vanity by the insight he had freely allowed her into the possibilities and the difficulties of his own Parliamentary position, and of his relations to Ferrier; and he had kept alive a kind of perpetual interest and flutter in her mind concerning him, by the challenge he was perpetually offering to the opinions and ideas in which she had been brought up—while yet combining it with a respect toward her father's memory, so courteous, and, in truth, sincere, that she was alternately roused and subdued.

On this February evening, it seemed to his exultant sense, as Diana sat chatting to him beside the fire, that his power with her had substantially advanced, that by a hundred subtle signs—quite involuntary on her part—she let him understand that his personality was pressing upon hers, penetrating her will, transforming her gay and fearless composure.

For instance, he had been lending her books representing his own political and social opinions. To her they were anathema. Her father's soul in her regarded them as forces of the pit, rising in ugly clamor to drag

down England from her ancient place. But to hate and shudder at them from afar had been comparatively easy. To battle with them at close quarters, as presented by this able and courteous antagonist, who passed so easily and without presumption from the opponent into the teacher, was a more teasing matter. She had many small successes and side-victories, but they soon ceased to satisfy her, in presence of the knowledge and ability of a man who had been ten years in Parliament, and had made for himself—she began to understand—a considerable position there. She was hotly loyal to her own faiths; but she was conscious of what often seemed to her a dangerous and demoralizing interest in his! A demoralizing pleasure, too, in listening—in sometimes laying aside the watchful, hostile air, in showing herself sweet, yielding, receptive.

These melting moods, indeed, were rare. But no one watching the two on this February evening could have failed to see in Diana signs of happiness, of a joyous and growing dependence, of something that refused to know itself, that masqueraded now as this feeling, now as that, yet was all the time stealing upon the sources of life, bewitching blood and brain. Marsham lamented that in ten days he and his mother must be in town for the Parliamentary season. Diana clearly endeavored to show nothing more than a polite regret. But in the half-laughing, half-forlorn requests she made to him for advice in certain practical matters which must be decided in his absence she betrayed herself; and Marsham found it amazingly sweet that she should do so. He said eagerly that he and Lady Lucy must certainly come down to Tallyn every alternate Sunday, so that the various small matters he had made Diana intrust to him

—the finding of a new gardener; negotiations with the Vavasours, connected with the cutting of certain trees—or the repairs of a ruinous gable of the house—should still be carried forward with all possible care and speed. Whereupon Diana inquired how such things could possibly engage the time and thought of a politician in the full stream of Parliament.

"They will be much more interesting to me," said Marsham, in a low steady voice, "than anything I shall be doing in Parliament."

Diana rose, in sudden vague terror—as though with the roar in her ears of rapids ahead—murmured some stammering thanks, walked across the room, lowered a lamp which was flaming, and recovered all her smiling self-possession. But she talked no more of her own affairs. She asked him, instead, for news of Miss Vincent.

Marsham answered, with difficulty. If there had been sudden alarm in her, there had been a sudden tumult of the blood in him. He had almost lost his hold upon himself; the great words had been almost spoken.

But when the conversation had been once more guided into normal channels, he felt that he had escaped a risk. No, no, not yet! One false step—one check—and he might still find himself groping in the dark. Better let himself be missed a little!—than move too soon. As to Roughsedge—he had kept his eyes open. There was nothing there.

So he gave what news of Marion Vincent he had to give. She was still in Bethnal Green working at her inquiry, often very ill, but quite indomitable. As soon as Parliament began she had promised to do some secretarial work for Marsham on two or three mornings a week.

"I saw her last week," said Marsham. "She always asks after you."

"I am so glad! I fell in love with her. Surely"—Diana hesitated—"surely—some day—she will marry Mr. Frobisher?"

Marsham shook his head.

"I think she feels herself too frail."

Diana remembered that little scene of intimacy—of tenderness—and Marsham's words stirred about her, as it were, winds of sadness and renunciation. She shivered under them a little, feeling, almost guiltily, the glow of her own life, the passion of her own hopes.

Marsham watched her as she sat on the other side of the fire, her beautiful head a little bent and pensive, the firelight playing on the oval of her cheek. How glad he was that he had not spoken!—that the barrier between them still held. A man may find heaven or hell on the other side of it. But merely to have crossed it makes life the poorer. One more of the great, the irrevocable moments spent and done—yielded to devouring time. He hugged the thought that it was still before him. The very timidity and anxiety he felt were delightful to him; he had never felt them before. And once more—involuntarily, disagreeably—he thought of Alicia Drake, and of the passages between them in the preceding summer.

Alicia was still at Tallyn, and her presence was, in truth, a constant embarrassment to him. Lady Lucy, on the contrary, had a strong sense of family duty toward her young cousin, and liked to have her for long visits at Tallyn or in London. Marsham believed his mother knew nothing of the old flirtation between them. Alicia, indeed, rarely showed any special interest in him now. He admitted her general discretion. Yet occasionally

she would put in a claim, a light word, now mocking, now caressing, which betrayed the old intimacy, and Marsham would wince under it. It was like a creeping touch in the dark. He had known what it was to feel both compunction and a kind of fear with regard to Alicia. But, normally, he told himself that both feelings were ridiculous. He had done nothing to compromise either himself or her. He had certainly flirted with Alicia; but he could not honestly feel that the chief part in the matter had been his.

These thoughts passed in a flash. The clock struck, and regretfully he got up to take his leave. Diana rose, too, with a kindling face.

"My cousin will be here directly!" she said, joyously.

"Shall I find her installed when I come next time?"

"I mean to keep her as long—as long—as ever I can!"

Marsham held her hand close and warm a moment, felt her look waver a second beneath his, and then, with a quick and resolute step, he went his way.

He was just putting on his coat in the outer hall when there was a sound of approaching wheels. A carriage stopped at the door, to which the butler hurried. As he opened it Marsham saw in the light of the porch lamp the face of a girl peering out of the carriage window. It was a little awkward. His own horse was held by a groom on the other side of the carriage. There was nothing to do but to wait till the young lady had passed. He drew to one side.

Miss Merton descended. There was just time for Marsham to notice an extravagant hat, smothered in ostrich feathers, a large-featured, rather handsome face, framed in a tangled mass of black hair, a pair of sharp eyes that seemed to take in hungrily all they saw—the

old hall, the butler, and himself, as he stood in the shadow. He heard the new guest speak to the butler about her luggage. Then the door of the inner hall opened, and he caught Diana's hurrying feet, and her cry—

"Fanny!"

He passed the lady and escaped. As he rode away into the darkness of the lanes he was conscious of an impression which had for the moment checked the happy flutter of blood and pulse. Was *that* the long-expected cousin? Poor Diana! A common-looking, vulgar young woman—with a most unpleasant voice and accent. An unpleasant manner, too, to the servants—half arrogant, half familiar. What a hat!—and what a fringe!—worthy of some young "lidy" in the Old Kent Road! The thought of Diana sitting at table with such a person on equal terms pricked him with annoyance; for he had all his mother's fastidiousness, though it showed itself in different forms. He blamed Mrs. Colwood—Diana ought to have been more cautiously guided. The thought of all the tender preparation made for the girl was both amusing and repellent.

Miss Merton, he understood, was Diana's cousin on the mother's side—the daughter of her mother's sister. A swarm of questions suddenly arose in his mind—questions not hitherto entertained. Had there been, in fact, a *mésalliance*—some disagreeable story—which accounted, perhaps, for the self-banishment of Mr. Mallory? —the seclusion in which Diana had been brought up? The idea was most unwelcome, but the sight of Fanny Merton had inevitably provoked it. And it led on to a good many other ideas and speculations of a mingled sort connected, now with Diana, now with recollections,

pleasant and unpleasant, of the eight or ten years which had preceded his first sight of her.

For Oliver Marsham was now thirty-six, and he had not reached that age without at least one serious attempt —quite apart from any passages with Alicia Drake—to provide himself with a wife. Some two years before this date he had proposed to a pretty girl of great family and no money, with whom he supposed himself ardently in love. She, after some hesitation, had refused him, and Marsham had had some reason to believe that in spite of his mother's great fortune and his own expectations, his *provenance* had not been regarded as sufficiently aristocratic by the girl's fond parents. Perhaps had he—and not Lady Lucy—been the owner of Tallyn and its £18,000 a year, things might have been different. As it was, Marsham had felt the affront, as a strong and self-confident man was likely to feel it; and it was perhaps in reaction from it that he had allowed himself those passages with Alicia Drake which had, at least, soothed his self-love.

In this affair Marsham had acted on one of the convictions with which he had entered public life—that there is no greater help to a politician than a distinguished, clever, and, if possible, beautiful wife. Distinction, Radical though he was, had once seemed to him a matter of family and "connection." But after the failure of his first attempt, "family," in the ordinary sense, had ceased to attract him. Personal breeding, intelligence, and charm—these, after all, are what the politician who is already provided with money, wants to secure in his wife; without, of course, any obvious disqualification in the way of family history. Diana, as he had first met her among the woods at Portofino, side by

side with her dignified and gentlemanly father, had made upon him precisely that impression of personal distinction of which he was in search—upon his mother also.

The appearance and the accent, however, of the cousin had struck him with surprise; nor was it till he was nearing Tallyn that he succeeded in shaking off the impression. Absurd! Everybody has some relations that require to be masked—like the stables, or the back door—in a skilful arrangement of life. Diana, his beautiful, unapproachable Diana, would soon, no doubt, be relieved of this young lady, with whom she could have no possible interests in common. And, perhaps, on one of his week-end visits to Tallyn and Beechcote, he might get a few minutes' conversation with Mrs. Colwood which would throw some light on the new guest.

Diana meanwhile, assisted by Mrs. Colwood, was hovering about her cousin. She and Miss Merton had kissed each other in the hall, and then Diana, seized with a sudden shyness, led her guest into the drawing-room and stood there speechless, a little; holding her by both hands and gazing at her; mastered by feeling and excitement.

"Well, you *have* got a queer old place!" said Fanny Merton, withdrawing herself. She turned and looked about her, at the room, the flowers, the wide hearth, with its blazing logs, at Mrs. Colwood, and finally at Diana.

"We are so fond of it already!" said Diana. "Come and get warm." She settled her guest in a chair by the fire, and took a stool beside her. "Did you like Devonshire?"

The girl made a little face.

"It was awfully quiet. Oh, my friends, of course,

made a lot of fuss over me—and that kind of thing. But I wouldn't live there, not if you paid me."

"We're very quiet here," said Diana, timidly. She was examining the face beside her, with its bright crude color, its bold eyes, and sulky mouth, slightly underhung.

"Oh, well, you've got some good families about, I guess. I saw one or two awfully smart carriages waiting at the station."

"There are a good many nice people," murmured Diana. "But there is not much going on."

"I expect you could invite a good many here if you wanted," said the girl, once more looking round her. "Whatever made you take this place?"

"I like old things so much," laughed Diana. "Don't you?"

"Well, I don't know. I think there's more style about a new house. You can have electric light and all that sort of thing."

Diana admitted it, and changed the subject. "Had the journey been cold?"

Freezing, said Miss Merton. But a young man had lent her his fur coat to put over her knees, which had improved matters. She laughed—rather consciously.

"He lives near here. I told him I was sure you'd ask him to something, if he called."

"Who was he?"

With much rattling of the bangles on her wrists, Fanny produced a card from her hand-bag. Diana looked at it in dismay. It was the card of a young solicitor whom she had once met at a local tea-party, and decided to avoid thenceforward.

She said nothing, however, and plunged into inquiries as to her aunt and cousins.

"Oh! they're all right. Mother's worried out of her life about money; but, then, we've always been that poor you couldn't skin a cent off us, so that's nothing new."

Diana murmured sympathy. She knew vaguely that her father had done a good deal to subsidize these relations. She could only suppose that in his ignorance he had not done enough.

Meanwhile Fanny Merton had fixed her eyes upon Diana with a curious hostile look, almost a stare, which had entered them as she spoke of the family poverty, and persisted as they travelled from Diana's face and figure to the pretty and spacious room beyond. She examined everything, in a swift keen scrutiny, and then as the pouncing glance came back to her cousin, the girl suddenly exclaimed:

"Goodness! but you are like Aunt Sparling!"

Diana flushed crimson. She drew back and said, hurriedly, to Mrs. Colwood:

"Muriel, would you see if they have taken the luggage up-stairs?"

Mrs. Colwood went at once.

Fanny Merton had herself changed color, and looked a little embarrassed. She did not repeat her remark, but began to take her furs off, to smooth her hair deliberately, and settle her bracelets. Diana came nearer to her as soon as they were alone.

"Do you really think I am like mamma?" she said, tremulously, all her eyes fixed upon her cousin.

"Well, of course I never saw her!" said Miss Merton, looking down at the fire. "How could I? But mother has a picture of her, and you're as like as two peas."

"I never saw any picture of mamma," said Diana; "I don't know at all what she was like."

"Ah, well—" said Miss Merton, still looking down. Then she stopped, and said no more. She took out her handkerchief, and began to rub a spot of mud off her dress. It seemed to Diana that her manner was a little strange, and rather rude. But she had made up her mind there would be peculiarities in Fanny, and she did not mean to be repelled by them.

"Shall I take you to your room?" she said. "You must be tired, and we shall be dining directly."

Miss Merton allowed herself to be led up-stairs, looking curiously round her at every step.

"I say, you must be well off!" she burst out, as they came to the head of the stairs, "or you'd never be able to run a place like this!"

"Papa left me all his money," said Diana, coloring again. "I hope he wouldn't have thought it extravagant."

She passed on in front of her guest, holding a candle. Fanny Merton followed. At Diana's statement as to her father's money the girl's face had suddenly resumed its sly hostility. And as Diana walked before her, Miss Merton again examined the house, the furniture, the pictures; but this time, and unknown to Diana, with the air of one half jealous and half contemptuous of all she saw.

Part II

"The soberest saints are more stiff-neckèd
Than the hottest-headed of the wicked."

CHAPTER VII

I SHALL soon be back," said Diana—"very soon. I'll just take this book to Dr. Roughsedge. You don't mind?"

The question was addressed—in a deprecatory tone—to Mrs. Colwood, who stood beside her at the Beechcote front door.

Muriel Colwood smiled, and drew the furs closer round the girl's slim throat.

"I shall mind very much if you don't stay out a full hour and get a good walk."

Diana ran off, followed by her dog. There was something in the manner both of the dog and its mistress that seemed to show impetuous escape—and relief.

"She looks tired out!" said the little companion to herself, as she turned to enter the hall. "How on earth is she going to get through six weeks of it?—or six months!"

The house as she walked back through it made upon her the odd impression of having suddenly lost some of its charm. The peculiar sentiment—as of a warmly human, yet delicately ordered life, which it had breathed out so freely only twenty-four hours before, seemed to her quick feeling to have been somehow obscured or dissipated. All its defects, old or new—the patches in the panelling, the darkness of the passages—stood out.

And "all along of Eliza!" All because of Miss Fanny Merton! Mrs. Colwood recalled the morning—Miss Merton's late arrival at the breakfast-table, and the discovery from her talk that she was accustomed to breakfast in bed, waited upon by her younger sisters; her conversation at breakfast, partly about the prices of clothes and eatables, partly in boasting reminiscence of her winnings at cards, or in sweepstakes on the "run," on board the steamer. Diana had then devoted herself to the display of the house, and her maid had helped Miss Merton to unpack. The process had been diversified by raids made by Miss Fanny on Diana's own wardrobe, which she had inspected from end to end, to an accompaniment of critical remark. According to her, there was very little that was really "shick" in it, and Diana should change her dressmaker. The number of her own dresses was large; and as to their colors and make, Mrs. Colwood, who had helped to put away some of them, could only suppose that tropical surroundings made tropical tastes. At the same time the contrast between Miss Fanny's wardrobe, and what she herself reported, in every tone of grievance and disgust, of the family poverty, was surprising, though no doubt a great deal of the finery had been as cheaply bought as possible.

By luncheon-time Diana had shown some symptoms of fatigue, perhaps — Mrs. Colwood hoped! — of revolt. She had been already sharply questioned as to the number of servants she kept and the wages they received, as to the people in the neighborhood who gave parties, and the ages and incomes of such young or unmarried men as might be met with at these parties. Miss Merton had boasted already of two love-affairs — one the unsuccessful engagement in Barbadoes, the other—"a

near thing"—which had enlivened the voyage to England; and she had extracted a promise from Diana to ask the young solicitor she had met with in the train—Mr. Fred Birch—to lunch, without delay. Meanwhile she had not—of her own initiative—said one word of those educational objects, in pursuit of which she was supposed to have come to England. Diana had proposed to her the names of certain teachers both of music and languages—names which she had obtained with much trouble. Miss Fanny had replied, rather carelessly, that she would think about it.

It was at this that the eager sweetness of Diana's manner to her cousin had shown its first cooling. And Mrs. Colwood had curiously observed that at the first sign of shrinking on her part, Miss Fanny's demeanor had instantly changed. It had become sugared and flattering to a degree. Everything in the house was "sweet"; the old silver used at table, with the Mallory crest, was praised extravagantly; the cooking no less. Yet still Diana's tired silence had grown; and the watching eyes of this amazing young woman had been, in Mrs. Colwood's belief, now insolently and now anxiously, aware of it.

Insolence!—that really, if one came to think of it, had been the note of Miss Merton's whole behavior from the beginning—an ill-concealed, hardly restrained insolence, toward the girl, two years older than herself, who had received her with such tender effusion, and was, moreover, in a position to help her so materially. What could it—what did it mean?

Mrs. Colwood stood at the foot of the stairs a moment, lost in a trance of wonderment. Her heart was really sore for Diana's disappointment, for the look in her face,

as she left the house. How on earth could the visit be shortened and the young lady removed?

The striking of three o'clock reminded Muriel Colwood that she was to take the new-comer out for an hour. They had taken coffee in the morning-room up-stairs, Diana's own sitting-room, where she wrote her letters and followed out the lines of reading her father had laid down for her. Mrs. Colwood returned thither; found Miss Merton, as it seemed to her, in the act of examining the letters in Diana's blotting-book; and hastily proposed to her to take a turn in the garden.

Fanny Merton hesitated, looked at Mrs. Colwood a moment dubiously, and finally walked up to her.

"Oh, I don't care about going out, it's so cold and nasty. And, besides, I—I want to talk to you."

"Miss Mallory thought you might like to see the old gardens," said Mrs. Colwood. "But if you would rather not venture out, I'm afraid I must go and write some letters."

"Why, you were writing letters all the morning! My fingers would drop off if I was to go on at it like that. Do you like being a companion? I should think it was rather beastly—if you ask me. At home they did talk about it for me. But I said: 'No, thank you! My own mistress, if you please!'"

The speaker sat down by the fire, raised her skirt of purple cloth, and stretched a pair of shapely feet to the warmth. Her look was good-humored and lazy.

"I am very happy here," said Mrs. Colwood, quietly. "Miss Mallory is so charming and so kind."

Miss Fanny cleared her throat, poked the fire with the tip of her shoe, fidgeted with her dress, and finally said —abruptly:

"I say—have all the people about here called?"

The tone was so low and furtive that Mrs. Colwood, who had been putting away some embroidery silks which had been left on the table by Diana, turned in some astonishment. She found the girl's eyes fixed upon her —eager and hungry.

"Miss Mallory has had a great many visitors"—she tried to pitch her words in the lightest possible tone—"I am afraid it will take her a long time to return all her calls."

"Well, I'm glad it's all right about that!—anyway. As mamma said, you never know. People are so queer about these things, aren't they? As if it was Diana's fault!"

Through all her wrath, Muriel Colwood was conscious of a sudden pang of alarm—which was, in truth, the reawakening of something already vaguely felt or surmised. She looked rather sternly at her companion.

"I really don't know what you mean, Miss Merton. And I never discuss Miss Mallory's affairs. Perhaps you will kindly allow me to go to my letters."

She was moving away when the girl beside her laughed again — rather angrily — and Mrs. Colwood paused, touched again by instinctive fear.

"Oh, of course if I'm not to say a word about it—I'm not—that's all! Well, now, look here—Diana needn't suppose that I've come all this way just for fun. I had to say that about lessons, and that kind of thing—I didn't want to set her against me—but I've . . . Well!—why should I be ashamed, I should like to know?"—she broke out, shrilly, sitting erect, her face flushing deeply, her eyes on fire. "If some one owes you something—why shouldn't you come and get it? Diana owes my mother

money!—a lot of money!—and we can't afford to lose it. Mother's awfully sweet about Diana—she said, 'Oh no, it's unkind'—but I say it's unkind to *us*, not to speak, when we all want money so bad—and there are the boys to bring up—and—"

"Miss Merton—I'm very sorry—but really I cannot let you talk to me of Miss Mallory's private affairs. It would neither be right—nor honorable. You must see that. She will be in by tea-time herself. Please!—"

Muriel's tone was gentle; but her attitude was resolution itself. Fanny Merton stared at the frail slim creature in her deep widow's black; her color rose.

"Oh, very well. Do as you like! — I'm agreeable! Only I thought perhaps—as you and Diana seem to be such tremendous friends—you'd like to talk it over with me first. I don't know how much Diana knows; and I thought perhaps you'd give me a hint. Of course, she'll know all there was in the papers. But my mother claims a deal more than the trust money—jewels, and that kind of thing. And Uncle Mallory treated us shamefully about them—*shamefully!* That's why I'm come over. I made mother let me! Oh, she's so soft, is mother, she'd let anybody off. But I said, 'Diana's rich, and she *ought* to make it up to us! If nobody else 'll ask her, I will!' "

The girl had grown pale, but it was a pallor of determination and of passion. Mrs. Colwood had listened to the torrent of words, held against her will, first by astonishment, then by something else. If it should be her duty to listen?—for the sake of this young life, which in these few weeks had so won upon her heart?

She retraced a few steps.

"Miss Merton, I do not understand what you have been saying. If you have any claim upon Miss Mallory,

you know well that she is the soul of honor and generosity. Her one desire is to give everybody *more* than their due. She is *too* generous—I often have to protect her. But, as I have said before, it is not for me to discuss any claim you may have upon her."

Fanny Merton was silent for a minute—staring at her companion. Then she said, abruptly:

"Does she ever talk to you about Aunt Sparling?"

"Her mother?"

The girl nodded.

Mrs. Colwood hesitated—then said, unwillingly: "No. She has mentioned her once or twice. One can see how she missed her as a child—how she misses her still."

"Well, I don't know what call she has to miss her!" cried Fanny Merton, in a note of angry scorn. "A precious good thing she died when she did—for everybody."

Mrs. Colwood felt her hands trembling. In the growing darkness of the winter afternoon it seemed to her startled imagination as though this black-eyed black-browed girl, with her scowling passionate face, were entering into possession of the house and of Diana—an evil and invading power. She tried to choose her words carefully.

"Miss Mallory has never talked to me of her parents. And, if you will excuse me, Miss Merton—if there is anything sad—or tragic—in their history, I would rather hear it from Miss Mallory than from you!"

"Anything sad? — anything *sad?* Well, upon my word!—"

The girl breathed fast. So, involuntarily, did Mrs. Colwood.

"You don't mean to say"—the speaker threw her body forward, and brought her face close to Mrs. Col-

wood—"you are not going to tell me that you don't know about Diana's mother?"

She laid her hand upon Muriel's dress.

"Why should I know? Please, Miss Merton!" and with a resolute movement Mrs. Colwood tried to withdraw her dress.

"Why, *everybody* knows! — everybody! — everybody! Ask anybody in the world about Juliet Sparling—and you'll see. In the saloon, coming over, I heard people talk about her all one night—they didn't know who *I* was—and of course I didn't tell. And there was a book in the ship's library—*Famous Trials*—or some name of that sort—with the whole thing in it. You don't know—about—Diana's *mother?*"

The fierce, incredulous emphasis on the last word, for a moment, withered all reply on Mrs. Colwood's lips. She walked to the door mechanically, to see that it was fast shut. Then she returned. She sat down beside Diana's guest, and it might have been seen that she had silenced fear and dismissed hesitation. "After all," she said, with quiet command, "I think I will ask you, Miss Merton, to explain what you mean?"

The February afternoon darkened round the old house. There was a light powdering of snow on grass and trees. Yet still there were breathings and bird-notes in the air, and tones of color in the distance, which obscurely prophesied the spring. Through the wood behind the house the snow-drops were rising, in a white invading host, over the ground covered with the red-brown deposit of innumerable autumns. Above their glittering white, rose an undergrowth of laurels and box, through which again shot up the magnificent trunks—gray and smooth

and round—of the great beeches, which held and peopled the country-side, heirs of its ancestral forest. Any one standing in the wood could see, through the leafless trees, the dusky blues and rich violets of the encircling hill—hung there, like the tapestry of some vast hall; or hear from time to time the loud wings of the wood-pigeons as they clattered through the topmost boughs.

Diana was still in the village. She had been spending her hour of escape mostly with the Roughsedges. The old doctor among his books was now sufficiently at his ease with her to pet her, teach her, and, when necessary, laugh at her. And Mrs. Roughsedge, however she might feel herself eclipsed by Lady Lucy, was, in truth, much more fit to minister to such ruffled feelings as Diana was now conscious of than that delicate and dignified lady. Diana's disillusion about her cousin was, so far, no very lofty matter. It hurt; but on her run to the village the natural common-sense Mrs. Colwood had detected had wrestled stoutly with her wounded feelings. Better take it with a laugh! To laugh, however, one must be distracted; and Mrs. Roughsedge, bubbling over with gossip and good-humor, was distraction personified. Stern Justice, in the person of Lord M.'s gamekeeper, had that morning brought back Diana's two dogs in leash, a pair of abject and convicted villains, from the delirium of a night's hunting. The son of Miss Bertram's coachman had only just missed an appointment under the District Council by one place on the list of candidates. A "Red Van" bursting with Socialist literature had that morning taken up its place on the village green; and Diana's poor housemaid, in payment for a lifetime's neglect, must now lose every tooth in her head, according to the verdict of the local dentist, an excellent young man, in Mrs. Rough-

sedge's opinon, but ready to give you almost too much pulling out for your money. On all these topics she overflowed—with much fun and unfailing good-humor. So that after half an hour spent with Mrs. Roughsedge and Hugh in the little drawing-room at the White Cottage, Diana's aspect was very different from what it had been when she arrived.

Hugh, however, had noticed her pallor and depression. He was obstinately certain that Oliver Marsham was not the man to make such a girl happy. Between the rich Radical member and the young officer—poor, slow of speech and wits, and passionately devoted to the old-fashioned ideals and traditions in which he had been brought up — there was a natural antagonism. But Roughsedge's contempt for his brilliant and successful neighbor—on the ground of selfish ambitions and unpatriotic trucklings—was, in truth, much more active than anything Marsham had ever shown — or felt — toward himself. For in the young soldier there slept potentialities of feeling and of action, of which neither he nor others were as yet aware.

Nevertheless, he faced the facts. He remembered the look with which Diana had returned to the Beechcote drawing-room, where Marsham awaited her, the day before—and told himself not to be a fool.

Meanwhile he had found an opportunity in which to tell her, unheard by his parents, that he was practically certain of his Nigerian appointment, and must that night break it to his father and mother. And Diana had listened like a sister, all sympathy and kind looks, promising in the young man's ear, as he said good-bye at the garden gate, that she would come again next day to cheer his mother up.

He stood looking after her as she walked away; his hands in his pockets, a flush on his handsome face. How her coming had glorified and transformed the place! No womanish nonsense, too, about this going of his!—though she knew well that it meant fighting. Only a kindling of the eyes—a few questions as practical as they were eager—and then that fluttering of the soft breath which he had noticed as she bent over his mother.

But she was not for him! Thus it is that women—the noblest and the dearest—throw themselves away. She, with all the right and proper feelings of an Englishwoman, to mate with this plausible Radical and Little Englander! Hugh kicked the stones of the gravel savagely to right and left as he walked back to the house—in a black temper with his poverty and Diana's foolishness.

But was she really in love? "Why then so pale, fond lover?" He found a kind of angry comfort in the remembrance of her drooping looks. They were no credit to Marsham, anyway.

Meanwhile Diana walked home, lingering by the way in two or three cottages. She was shyly beginning to make friends with the people. An old road-mender kept her listening while he told her how a Tallyn keeper had peppered him in the eye, ten years before, as he was crossing Barrow Common at dusk. One eye had been taken out, and the other was almost useless; there he sat, blind, and cheerfully telling the tale—"Muster Marsham—Muster Henry Marsham—had been verra kind—ten shillin' a week, and an odd job now and then. I do suffer terr'ble, miss, at times—but ther's noa good in grumblin'—is there?"

Next door, in a straggling line of cottages, she found

a gentle, chattering widow whose husband had been drowned in the brew-house at Beechcote twenty years before, drowned in the big vat!—before any one had heard a cry or a sound. The widow was proud of so exceptional a tragedy; eager to tell the tale. How had she lived since? Oh, a bit here and a bit there. And, of late, half a crown from the parish.

Last of all, in a cottage midway between the village and Beechcote, she paused to see a jolly middle-aged woman, with a humorous eye and a stream of conversation—held prisoner by an incurable disease. She was absolutely alone in the world. Nobody knew what she had to live on. But she could always find a crust for some one more destitute than herself, and she ranked high among the wits of the village. To Diana she talked of her predecessors—the Vavasours—whose feudal presence seemed to be still brooding over the village. With little chuckles of laughter, she gave instance after instance of the tyranny with which they had lorded it over the country-side in early Victorian days: how the "Madam Vavasour" of those days had pulled the feathers from the village-girls' hats, and turned a family who had offended her, with all their belongings, out into the village street. But when Diana rejoiced that such days were done, the old woman gave a tolerant: "Noa—noa! They were none so bad—were t' Vavasours. Only they war no good at heirin."

"Airing?" said Diana, mystified.

"Heirin," repeated Betty Dyson, emphatically. "Theer was old Squire Henry—wi' noabody to follow 'im—an' Mr. Edward noa better—and now thissun, wi nobbut lasses. Noa—they war noa good at heirin—moor's t' pity." Then she looked slyly at her companion: "An'

yo', miss? yo'll be gettin' married one o' these days, I'll uphowd yer."

Diana colored and laughed.

"Ay," said the old woman, laughing too, with the merriment of a girl. "Sweethearts is noa good—but you mun ha' a sweetheart!"

Diana fled, pursued by Betty's raillery, and then by the thought of this lonely laughing woman, often tormented by pain, standing on the brink of ugly death, and yet turning back to look with this merry indulgent eye upon the past; and on this dingy old world, in which she had played so ragged and limping a part. Yet clearly she would play it again if she could—so sweet is mere life!—and so hard to silence in the breast.

Diana walked quickly through the woods, the prey of one of those vague storms of feeling which test and stretch the soul of youth.

To what horrors had she been listening?—the suffering of the blinded road-mender—the grotesque and hideous death of the young laborer in his full strength—the griefs of a childless and penniless old woman? Yet life had somehow engulfed the horrors; and had spread its quiet waves above them, under a pale, late-born sunshine. The stoicism of the poor rebuked her, as she thought of the sharp impatience and disappointment in which she had parted from Mrs. Colwood.

She seemed to hear her father's voice. "No shirking, Diana! You asked her—you formed absurd and exaggerated expectations. She is here; and she is not responsible for your expectations. Make the best of her, and do your duty!"

And eagerly the child's heart answered: "Yes, yes, papa!—dear papa!"

And there, sharp in color and line, it rose on the breast of memory, the beloved face. It set pulses beating in Diana which from her childhood onward had been a life within her life, a pain answering to pain, the child's inevitable response to the father's misery, always discerned, never understood.

This abiding remembrance of a dumb unmitigable grief beside which she had grown up, of which she had never known the secret, was indeed one of the main factors in Diana's personality. Muriel Colwood had at once perceived it; Marsham had been sometimes puzzled by the signs of it.

To-day—because of Fanny and this toppling of her dreams—the dark mood, to which Diana was always liable, had descended heavily upon her. She had no sooner rebuked it—by the example of the poor, or the remembrance of her father's long patience—than she was torn by questions, vehement, insistent, full of a new anguish.

Why had her father been so unhappy? What was the meaning of that cloud under which she had grown up?

She had repeated to Muriel Colwood the stock explanations she had been accustomed to give herself of the manner and circumstances of her bringing-up. To-day they seemed to her own mind, for the first time, utterly insufficient. In a sudden crash and confusion of feeling it was as though she were tearing open the heart of the past, passionately probing and searching.

Certain looks and phrases of Fanny Merton were really working in her memory. They were so light—yet so ugly. They suggested something, but so vaguely that Diana could find no words for it: a note of desecration,

of cheapening—a breath of dishonor. It was as though a mourner, shut in for years with sacred memories, became suddenly aware that all the time, in a sordid world outside, these very memories had been the sport of an unkind and insolent chatter that besmirched them.

Her mother!

In the silence of the wood the girl's slender figure stiffened itself against an attacking thought. In her inmost mind she knew well that it was from her mother —and her mother's death—that all the strangeness of the past descended. But yet the death and grief she remembered had never presented themselves to her as they appear to other bereaved ones. Why had nobody ever spoken to her of her mother in her childhood and youth?—neither father, nor nurses, nor her old French governess? Why had she no picture—no relics—no letters? In the box of "Sparling Papers" there was nothing that related to Mrs. Sparling; that she knew, for her father had abruptly told her so not long before his death. They were old family records which he could not bear to destroy—the honorable records of an upright race, which some day, he thought, "might be a pleasure to her."

Often during the last six months of his life, it seemed to her now, in this intensity of memory, that he had been on the point of breaking the silence of a lifetime. She recalled moments and looks of agonized effort and yearning. But he died of a growth in the throat; and for weeks before the end speech was forbidden them, on account of the constant danger of hemorrhage. So that Diana had always felt herself starved of those last words and messages which make the treasure of bereaved love. Often and often the cry of her loneliness to her dead father had

been the bitter cry of Andromache to Hector: "I had from thee, in dying, no memorable word on which I might ever think in the year of mourning while I wept for thee."

Had there been a quarrel between her father and mother?—or something worse?—at which Diana's ignorance of life, imposed upon her by her upbringing, could only glance in shuddering? She knew her mother had died at twenty-six; and that in the two years before her death Mr. Mallory had been much away, travelling and exploring in Asia Minor. The young wife must have been often alone. Diana, with a sudden catching of the breath, envisaged possibilities of which no rational being of full age who reads a newspaper can be unaware.

Then, with an inward passion of denial, she shook the whole nightmare from her. Outrage!—treason!—to those helpless memories of which she was now the only guardian. In these easy, forgetting days, when the old passions and endurances look to us either affected or eccentric, such a life, such an exile as her father's, may seem strange even — so she accused herself — to that father's child. But that is because we are mean souls beside those who begot us. We cannot feel as they; and our constancy, compared to theirs, is fickleness.

So, in spirit, she knelt again beside her dead, embracing their cold feet and asking pardon.

The tears clouded her eyes; she wandered blindly on through the wood till she was conscious of sudden light and space. She had come to a clearing, where several huge beeches had been torn up by a storm some years before. Their place had been filled by a tangle of many saplings, and in their midst rose an elder-bush, already showing leaf, amid the bare winterly wood. The last

western light caught the twinkling leaf buds, and made of the tree a Burning Bush, first herald of the spring.

The sight of it unloosed some swell of passion in Diana; she found herself smiling amid her tears, and saying incoherent things that only the wood caught.

To-day was the meeting of Parliament. She pictured the scene. Marsham was there, full of projects and ambitions. Innocently, exultantly, she reminded herself how much she knew of them. If he could not have her sympathy, he must have her antagonism. But no chilling exclusions and reserves! Rather, a generous confidence on his side; and a gradual, a child-like melting and kindling on hers. In politics she would never agree with him—never!—she would fight him with all her breath and strength. But not with the methods of Mrs. Fotheringham. No!—what have politics to do with—with—

She dropped her face in her hands, laughing to herself, the delicious tremors of first love running through her. Would she hear from him? She understood she was to be written to, though she had never asked it. But ought she to allow it? Was it *convenable?* She knew that girls now did what they liked—threw all the old rules overboard. But—proudly—she stood by the old rules; she would do nothing "fast" or forward. Yet she was an orphan—standing alone; surely for her there might be more freedom than for others?

She hurried home. With the rush of new happiness had come back the old pity, the old yearning. It wasn't, wasn't Fanny's fault! She—Diana—had always understood that Mr. Merton was a vulgar, grasping man of no breeding who had somehow entrapped "your aunt Bertha—who was very foolish and very young"—into a

most undesirable marriage. As for Mrs. Merton—Aunt Bertha—Fanny had with her many photographs, among them several of her mother. A weak, heavy face, rather pretty still. Diana had sought her own mother in it, with a passionate yet shrinking curiosity, only to provoke a rather curt reply from Fanny, in answer to a question she had, with difficulty, brought herself to put:

"Not a bit! There wasn't a scrap of likeness between mother and Aunt Sparling."

The evening passed off better than the morning had done. Eyes more acute in her own interests than Diana's might have perceived a change in Fanny Merton, after her long conversation with Mrs. Colwood. A certain excitement, a certain triumph, perhaps an occasional relenting and compunction: all these might have been observed or guessed. She made herself quite amiable: showed more photographs, talked still more frankly of her card-winnings on the steamer, and of the flirtation which had beguiled the voyage; bespoke the immediate services of Diana's maid for a dress that must be done up; and expressed a desire for another and a bigger wardrobe in her room. Gradually a tone of possession, almost of command, crept in. Diana, astonished and amused, made no resistance. These, she supposed, were West-Indian manners. The Colonies are like healthy children that submit in their youth, and then grow up and order the household about. What matter!

Meanwhile Mrs. Colwood looked a little pale, and confessed to a headache. Diana was pleased, however, to see that she and Fanny were getting on better than had seemed to be probable in the morning. Fanny wished—

nay, was resolved—to be entertained and amused. Mrs. Colwood threw herself with new zest into the various plans Diana had made for her cousin. There was to be a luncheon-party, an afternoon tea, and so forth. Only Diana, pricked by a new mistrust, said nothing in public about an engagement she had (to spend a Saturday-to-Monday with Lady Lucy at Tallyn three weeks later), though she and Muriel made anxious plans as to what could be done to amuse Fanny during the two days.

Diana was alone in her room at night when Mrs. Colwood knocked. Would Diana give her some lavender-water?—her headache was still severe. Diana flew to minister to her; but, once admitted, Muriel said no more of her headache. Rather she began to soothe and caress Diana. Was she in better spirits? Let her only intrust the entertaining of Fanny Merton to her friend and companion—Mrs. Colwood would see to it. Diana laughed, and silenced her with a kiss.

Presently they were sitting by the fire, Muriel Colwood in a large arm-chair, a frail, fair creature, with her large dark-circled eyes, and her thin hands and arms; Diana kneeling beside her.

"I had no idea what a poison poverty could be!" said Muriel, abruptly, with her gaze on the fire.

"My cousin?" Diana looked up startled. "Was that what she was saying to you?"

Muriel nodded assent. Her look — so anxious and tender—held, enveloped her companion.

"Are they in debt?" said Diana, slowly.

"Terribly. They seem to be going to break up their home."

"Did she tell you all about it?"

Mrs. Colwood hesitated.

"A great deal more than I wanted to know!" she said, at last, as though the words broke from her.

Diana thought a little.

"I wonder—whether that was—what she came home for?"

Mrs. Colwood moved uneasily.

"I suppose if you are in those straits you don't really think of anything else—though you may wish to."

"Did she tell you how much they want?" said Diana, quickly.

"She named a thousand pounds!"

Muriel might have been describing her own embarrassments, so scarlet had she become.

"A thousand pounds!" cried Diana, in amazement. "But then why—why—does she have so many frocks—and play cards for money—and bet on races?"

She threw her arms round Mrs. Colwood's knees impetuously.

Muriel's small hand smoothed back the girl's hair, timidly yet eagerly.

"I suppose that's the way they've been brought up."

"A thousand pounds! And does she expect me to provide it?"

"I am afraid—she hopes it."

"But I haven't got it!" cried Diana, sitting down on the floor. "I've spent more than I ought on this place; I'm overdrawn; I ought to be economical for a long time. You know, Muriel, I'm not really rich."

Mrs. Colwood colored deeper than ever. But apparently she could think of nothing to say. Her eyes were riveted on her companion.

"No, I'm not rich," resumed Diana, with a frown, drawing circles on the ground with her finger. "Perhaps

I oughtn't to have taken this house. I dare say it was horrid of me. But I couldn't have known—could I?—that Fanny would be coming and want a thousand pounds?"

She looked up expecting sympathy—perhaps a little indignation. Mrs. Colwood only said:

"I suppose she would not have come over—if things had not been *very* bad."

"Why didn't she give me some warning?" cried Diana—"instead of talking about French lessons! But am I bound—do *you* think I am bound?—to give the Mertons a thousand pounds? I know papa got tired of giving them money. I wonder if it's *right!*"

She frowned. Her voice was a little stern. Her eyes flashed.

Mrs. Colwood again touched her hair with a hand that trembled.

"They are your only relations, aren't they?" she said, pleadingly.

"Yes," said Diana, still with the same roused look.

"Perhaps it would set them on their feet altogether."

The girl gave a puzzled laugh.

"Did she—Muriel, did she ask you to tell me?"

"I think she wanted me to break it to you," said Mrs. Colwood, after a moment. "And I thought it—it might save you pain."

"Just like you!" Diana stooped to kiss her hand. "That's what your headache meant! Well, but now—ought I—ought I—to do it?"

She clasped her hands round her knees and swayed backward and forward—pondering—with a rather sombre brow. Mrs. Colwood's expression was hidden in the darkness of the big chair.

"—Always supposing I can do it," resumed Diana. "And I certainly couldn't do it at once; I haven't got it. I should have to sell something, or borrow from the bank. No, I must think — I must think over it," she added more resolutely, as though her way cleared.

"Of course," said Mrs. Colwood, faintly. Then she raised herself. "Let me tell her so—let me save you the conversation."

"You dear!—but why should you!" said Diana, in amazement.

"Let me."

"If you like! But I can't have Fanny making you look like this. Please, please go to bed."

An hour later Mrs. Colwood, in her room, was still up and dressed, hanging motionless, and deep in thought, over the dying fire. And before she went to sleep—far in the small hours—her pillow was wet with crying.

CHAPTER VIII

"I THOUGHT I'd perhaps better let you know—I'm —well, I'm going to have a talk with Diana this morning!"

The voice was determined. Muriel Colwood—startled and dismayed—surveyed the speaker. She had been waylaid on the threshold of her room. The morning was half-way through. Visitors, including Mr. Fred Birch, were expected to lunch, and Miss Merton, who had been lately invisible, had already, she saw, changed her dress. At breakfast, it seemed to Mrs. Colwood, she had been barely presentable: untidy hair, a dress with various hooks missing, and ruffles much in need of washing. Muriel could only suppose that the carelessness of her attire was meant to mark the completeness of her conquest of Beechcote. But now her gown of scarlet velveteen, her arms bare to the elbow, her frizzled and curled hair, the powder which gave a bluish white to her complexion, the bangles and beads which adorned her, showed her armed to the last pin for the encounters of the luncheon-table.

Mrs. Colwood, however, after a first dazzled look at what she wore, thought only of what she said. She hurriedly drew the girl into her own room, and shut the door. When, after some conversation, Fanny emerged, Mrs. Colwood was left in a state of agitation that was partly fear, partly helpless indignation. During the

fortnight since Miss Merton's arrival all the energies of the house had been devoted to her amusement. A little whirlwind of dissipation had blown through the days. Two meets, a hockey-match, a concert at the neighboring town, a dinner-party and various "drums," besides a luncheon-party and afternoon tea at Beechcote itself in honor of the guest — Mrs. Colwood thought the girl might have been content! But she had examined everything presented to her with a very critical eye, and all through it had been plain that she was impatient and dissatisfied; for, inevitably, her social success was not great. Diana, on the other hand, was still a new sensation, and something of a queen wherever she went. Her welcoming eyes, her impetuous smile drew a natural homage; and Fanny followed sulkily in her wake, accepted—not without surprise—as Miss Mallory's kinswoman, but distinguished by no special attentions.

In any case, she would have rebelled against the situation. Her vanity was amazing, her temper violent. At home she had been treated as a beauty, and had ruled the family with a firm view to her own interests. What in Alicia Drake was disguised by a thousand subleties of class and training was here seen in its crudest form. But there was more besides—miserably plain now to this trembling spectator. The resentment of Diana's place in life, as of something robbed, not earned—the scarcely concealed claim either to share it or attack it—these things were no longer riddles to Muriel Colwood. Rather they were the storm-signs of a coming tempest, already darkening above an innocent head.

What could she do? The little lady gave her days and nights to the question, and saw no way out. Sometimes she hoped that Diana's personality had made an

impression on this sinister guest; she traced a grudging consciousness in Fanny of her cousin's generosity and charm. But this perception only led to fresh despondency. Whenever Fanny softened, it showed itself in a claim to intimacy, as sudden and as violent as her ill-temper. She must be Diana's first and dearest — be admitted to all Diana's secrets and friendships. Then on Diana's side, inevitable withdrawal, shrinking, self-defence — and on Fanny's a hotter and more acrid jealousy.

Meanwhile, as Mrs. Colwood knew, Diana had been engaged in correspondence with her solicitors, who had been giving her some prudent and rather stringent advice on the subject of income and expenditure. This morning, so Mrs. Colwood believed, a letter had arrived.

Presently she stole out of her room to the head of the stairs. There she remained, pale and irresolute, for a little while, listening to the sounds in the house. But the striking of the hall clock, the sighing of a stormy wind round the house, and, occasionally, a sound of talking in the drawing-room, was all she heard.

Diana had been busy in the hanging of some last pictures in the drawing-room—photographs from Italian pictures and monuments. They had belonged to her father, and had been the dear companions of her childhood. Each, as she handled it, breathed its own memory; of the little villa on the Portofino road, with its green shutters, and rooms closed against the sun; or of the two short visits to Lucca and Florence she had made with her father.

Among the photographs was one of the "Annunciation" by Donatello, which glorifies the southern wall of

Santa Croce. Diana had just hung it in a panelled corner, where its silvery brilliance on dark wood made a point of pleasure for the eye. She lingered before it, wondering whether it would please *him* when he came. Unconsciously her life had slipped into this habit of referring all its pains and pleasures to the unseen friend —holding with him that constant dialogue of the heart without which love neither begins nor grows.

Yet she no longer dreamed of discussing Fanny, and the perplexities Fanny had let loose on Beechcote, with the living Marsham. Money affairs must be kept to one's self; and somehow Fanny's visit had become neither more nor less than a money affair.

That morning Diana had received a letter from old Mr. Riley, the head of the firm of Riley & Bonner— a letter which was almost a lecture. If the case were indeed urgent, said Mr. Riley, if the money must be found, she could, of course, borrow on her securities, and the firm would arrange it for her. But Mr. Riley, excusing himself as her father's old friend, wrote with his own hand to beg her to consider the matter further. Her expenses had lately been many, and some of her property might possibly decline in value during the next few years. A prudent management of her affairs was really essential. Could not the money be gradually saved out of income?

Diana colored uncomfortably as she thought of the letter. What did the dear old man suppose she wanted the money for? It hurt her pride that she must appear in this spendthrift light to eyes so honest and scrupulous.

But what could she do? Fanny poured out ugly reports of her mother's financial necessities to Muriel

Colwood; Mrs. Colwood repeated them to Diana. And the Mertons were Diana's only kinsfolk. The claim of blood pressed her hard.

Meanwhile, with a shrinking distaste, she had tried to avoid the personal discussion of the matter with Fanny. The task of curbing the girl's impatience, day after day, had fallen to Mrs. Colwood.

Diana was still standing in a reverie before the "Annunciation" when the drawing-room door opened. As she looked round her, she drew herself sharply together with the movement of a sudden and instinctive antipathy.

"That's all right," said Fanny Merton, surveying the room with satisfaction, and closing the door behind her. "I thought I'd find you alone."

Diana remained nervously standing before the picture, awaiting her cousin, her eyes wider than usual, one hand at her throat.

"Look here," said Fanny, approaching her, "I want to talk to you."

Diana braced herself. "All right." She threw a look at the clock. "Just give me time to get tidy before lunch."

"Oh, there's an hour—time enough!"

Diana drew forward an arm-chair for Fanny, and settled herself into the corner of a sofa. Her dog jumped up beside her, and laid his nose on her lap.

Fanny held herself straight. Her color under the powder had heightened a little. The two girls confronted each other, and, vaguely, perhaps, each felt the strangeness of the situation. Fanny was twenty, Diana twenty-three. They were of an age when girls are generally under the guidance or authority of their elders; com-

paratively little accustomed, in the normal family, to discuss affairs or take independent decisions. Yet here they met, alone and untrammelled; as hostess and guest in the first place; as kinswomen, yet comparative strangers to each other, and conscious of a secret dislike, each for the other. On the one side, an exultant and partly cruel consciousness of power; on the other, feelings of repugnance and revolt, only held in check by the forces of a tender and scrupulous nature.

Fanny cleared her throat.

"Well, of course, Mrs. Colwood's told me all you've been saying to her. And I don't say I'm surprised."

Diana opened her large eyes.

"Surprised at what?"

"Surprised—well!—surprised you didn't see your way all at once, and that kind of thing. I know I'd want to ask a lot of questions—shouldn't I, just! Why, that's what I expected. But, you see, my time in England's getting on. I've nothing to say to my people, and they bother my life out every mail."

"What did you really come to England for?" said Diana, in a low voice. Her attitude, curled up among the cushions of the sofa, gave her an almost childish air. Fanny, on the other hand, resplendent in her scarlet dress and high coiffure, might have been years older than her cousin. And any stranger watching the face in which the hardness of an "old campaigner" already strove with youth, would have thought her, and not Diana, the mistress of the house.

At Diana's question, Fanny's eyes flickered a moment.

"Oh, well, I had lots of things in my mind. But it was the money that mattered most."

"I see," murmured Diana.

Fanny fidgeted a little with one of the three bead necklaces which adorned her. Then she broke out:

"Look here, Diana, you've never been poor in your life, so you don't know what it's like being awfully hard up. But ever since father died, mother's had a frightful lot of trouble—all of us to keep, and the boys' schooling to pay, and next to nothing to do it on. Father left everything in a dreadful muddle. He never had a bit of sense—"

Diana made a sudden movement. Fanny looked at her astonished, expecting her to speak. Diana, however, said nothing, and the girl resumed:

"I mean, in business. He'd got everything into a shocking state, and instead of six hundred a year for us—as we'd always been led on to expect—well, there wasn't three! Then, you know, Uncle Mallory used to send us money. Well" (she cleared her throat again and looked away from Diana), "about a year before he died he and father fell out about something—so *that* didn't come in any more. Then we thought perhaps he'd remember us in his will. And that was another disappointment. So, you see, really mother didn't know where to turn."

"I suppose papa thought he had done all he could," said Diana, in a voice which tried to keep quite steady. "He never denied any claim he felt just. I feel I must say that, because you seem to blame papa. But, of course, I am very sorry for Aunt Bertha."

At the words "claim" and "just" there was a quick change of expression in Fanny's eyes. She broke out angrily: "Well, you really don't know about it, Diana, so it's no good talking. And I'm not going to rake up old things—"

"But if I don't know," said Diana, interrupting, "hadn't you better tell me? Why did papa and Uncle Merton disagree? And why did you think papa ought to have left you money?" She bent forward insistently. There was a dignity—perhaps also a touch of haughtiness—in her bearing which exasperated the girl beside her. The haughtiness was that of one who protects the dead. But Fanny's mind was not one that perceived the finer shades.

"Well, I'm not going to say!" said Fanny, with vehemence. "But I can tell you, mother *has* a claim!—and Uncle Mallory *ought* to have left us something!"

The instant the words were out she regretted them. Diana abandoned her childish attitude. She drew herself together, and sat upright on the edge of the sofa. The color had come flooding back hotly into her cheeks, and the slightly frowning look produced by the effort to see the face before her distinctly gave a peculiar intensity to the eyes.

"Fanny, please!—you must tell me why!"

The tone, resolute, yet appealing, put Fanny in an evident embarrassment.

"Well, I can't," she said, after a moment—"so it's no good asking me." Then suddenly, she hesitated—"or—at least—"

"At least what? Please go on."

Fanny wriggled again, then said, with a burst:

"Well, my mother was Aunt Sparling's younger sister—you know that—don't you?—"

"Of course."

"And our grandfather died a year before Aunt Sparling. She was mother's trustee. Oh, the money's all right—the trust money, I mean," said the girl, hastily.

"But it was a lot of other things—that mother says grandpapa always meant to divide between her and Aunt Sparling—and she never had them—nor a farthing out of them!"

"What other things? I don't understand."

"Jewels!—there!—jewels—and a lot of plate. Mother says she had a right to half the things that belonged to her mother. Grandpapa always told her she should have them. And there wasn't a word about them in the will."

"*I* haven't any diamonds," said Diana, quietly, "or any jewels at all, except a string of pearls papa gave me when I was nineteen, and two or three little things we bought in Florence."

Fanny Merton grew still redder; she stared aggressively at her cousin:

"Well—that was because—Aunt Sparling sold all the things!"

Diana started and recoiled.

"You mean," she said—her breath fluttering—"that—mamma sold things she had no right to—and never gave Aunt Bertha the money!"

The restrained passion of her look had an odd effect upon her companion. Fanny first wavered under it, then laughed—a laugh that was partly perplexity, partly something else, indecipherable.

"Well, as I wasn't born then, I don't know. You needn't be cross with me, Diana; I didn't mean to say any harm of anybody. But—mother says"—she laid an obstinate stress on each word—"that she remembers quite well—grandpapa meant her to have: a diamond necklace; a *rivière*" (she began to check the items off on her fingers)—"there were two, and of course Aunt

Sparling had the best; two bracelets, one with turquoises and one with pearls; a diamond brooch; an opal pendant; a little watch set with diamonds grandma used to wear; and then a lot of plate! Mother wrote me out a list—I've got it here."

She opened a beaded bag on her wrist, took out half a sheet of paper, and handed it to Diana.

Diana looked at it in silence. Even her lips were white, and her fingers shook.

"Did you ever send this to papa?" she asked, after a minute.

Fanny fidgeted again.

"Yes."

"And what did he say? Have you got his letter?"

"No; I haven't got his letter."

"Did he admit that—that mamma had done this?"

Fanny hesitated; but her intelligence, which was of a simple kind, did not suggest to her an ingenious line of reply.

"Well, I dare say he didn't. But that doesn't make any difference."

"Was that what he and Uncle Merton quarrelled about?"

Fanny hesitated again; then broke out: "Father only did what he ought — he asked for what was owed mother!"

"And papa wouldn't give it!" cried Diana, in a strange note of scorn; "papa, who never could rest if he owed a farthing to anybody—who always overpaid everybody —whom everybody—"

She rose suddenly with a bitten lip. Her eyes blazed —and her cheeks. She walked to the window and stood looking out, in a whirlwind of feeling and memory, hiding

"YOU NEEDN'T BE CROSS WITH ME, DIANA"

her face as best she could from the girl who sat watching her with an expression half sulky, half insolent. Diana was thinking of moments—recalling forgotten fragments of dialogue—in the past, which showed her father's opinion of his Barbadoes brother-in-law: "A grasping, ill-bred fellow"—"neither gratitude, nor delicacy"—"has been the evil genius of his wife, and will be the ruin of his children." She did not believe a word of Fanny's story—not a word of it!

She turned impetuously. Then, as her eyes met Fanny's, a shock ran through her—the same sudden, inexplicable fear which had seized on Mrs. Colwood, only more sickening, more paralyzing. And it was a fear which ran back to and linked itself with the hour of heart-searching in the wood. What was Fanny thinking of?—what was in her mind—on her lips? Impulses she could not have defined, terrors to which she could give no name, crept over Diana's will and disabled it. She trembled from head to foot—and gave way.

She walked up to her cousin.

"Fanny, is there any letter—anything of grandpapa's—or of my mother's—that you could show me?"

"No! It was a promise, I tell you—there was no writing. But my mother could swear to it."

The girl faced her cousin without flinching. Diana sat down again, white and tremulous, the moment of energy, of resistance, gone. In a wavering voice she began to explain that she had, in fact, been inquiring into her affairs, that the money was not actually at her disposal, that to provide it would require an arrangement with her bankers, and the depositing of some securities; but that, before long, it should be available.

Fanny drew a long breath. She had not expected the

surrender. Her eyes sparkled, and she began to stammer thanks.

"Don't!" said Diana, putting out a hand. "If I owe it you—and I take it on your word—the money shall be paid—that's all. Only—only, I wish you had not written to me like that; and I ask that—that—you will never, please, speak to me about it again!"

She had risen, and was standing, very tall and rigid, her hands pressing against each other.

Fanny's face clouded.

"Very well," she said, as she rose from her seat, "I'm sure I don't want to talk about it. I didn't like the job a bit—nor did mother. But if you are poor—and somebody owes you something—you can't help trying to get it—that's all!"

Diana said nothing. She went to the writing-table and began to arrange some letters. Fanny looked at her.

"I say, Diana!—perhaps you won't want me to stay here after— You seem to have taken against me."

Diana turned.

"No," she said, faintly. Then, with a little sob: "I thought of nothing but your coming."

Fanny flushed.

"Well, of course you've been very kind to me—and all that sort of thing. I wasn't saying you hadn't been. Except— Well, no, there's one thing I *do* think you've been rather nasty about!"

The girl threw back her head defiantly.

Diana's pale face questioned her.

"I was talking to your maid yesterday," said Fanny, slowly, "and she says you're going to stay at some smart place next week, and you've been getting a new dress for

it. And you've never said a *word* to me about it—let alone ask me to go with you!"

Diana looked at her amazed.

"You mean—I'm going to Tallyn!"

"That's it," said Fanny, reproachfully. "And you know I don't get a lot of fun at home—and I might as well be seeing people—and going about with you—though I do have to play second fiddle. You're rich, of course—everybody's nice to you—"

She paused. Diana, struck dumb, could find, for the moment, nothing to say. The red flamed in Fanny's cheeks, and she turned away with a flounce.

"Oh, well, you'd better say it at once—you're ashamed of me! I haven't had your blessed advantages! Do you think I don't know that!"

In the girl's heightened voice and frowning brow there was a touch of fury, of goaded pride, that touched Diana with a sudden remorse. She ran toward her cousin—appealing:

"I'm *very* sorry, Fanny. I—I don't like to leave you—but they are my great friends—and Lady Lucy, though she's very kind, is very old-fashioned. One couldn't take the smallest liberty with her. I don't think I could ask to take you—when they are quite by themselves—and the house is only half mounted. But Mrs. Colwood and I had been thinking of several things that might amuse you—and I shall only be two nights away."

"I don't want any amusing—thanks!" said Fanny, walking to the door.

She closed it behind her. Diana clasped her hands overhead in a gesture of amazement.

"To quarrel with me about that—after—the other thing!"

No!—not Tallyn!—not Tallyn!—anywhere, anything, but that!

Was she proud?—snobbish? Her eyes filled with tears, but her will hardened. What was to be gained? Fanny would not like them, nor they her.

The luncheon-party had been arranged for Mr. Birch, Fanny's train acquaintance. Diana had asked the Roughsedges, explaining the matter, with a half-deprecating, half-humorous face, to the comfortable ear of Mrs. Roughsedge. Explanation was necessary, for this particular young man was only welcome in those houses of the neighborhood which were not socially dainty. Mrs. Roughsedge understood at once—laughed heartily—accepted with equal heartiness—and then, taking Diana's hand, she said, with a shining of her gray eye:

"My dear, if you want Henry and me to stand on our heads we will attempt it with pleasure. You are an angel!—and angels are not to be worried by solicitors."

The first part of which remark referred to a certain morning after Hugh's announcement of his appointment to the Nigerian expedition, when Diana had shown the old people a sweet and daughter-like sympathy, which had entirely won whatever portion of their hearts remained still to be captured.

Hugh, meanwhile, was not yet gone, though he was within a fortnight of departure. He was coming to luncheon, with his parents, in order to support Diana. The family had seen Miss Merton some two or three times, and were all strongly of opinion that Diana very much wanted supporting. "Why should one be civil to one's cousin?" Dr. Roughsedge inquired of his wife. "If they are nice, let them stand on their own merits. If

not, they are disagreeable people who know a deal too much about you. Miss Diana should have consulted me!"

The Roughsedges arrived early, and found Diana alone in the drawing-room. Again Captain Roughsedge thought her pale, and was even sure that she had lost flesh. This time it was hardly possible to put these symptoms down to Marsham's account. He chafed under the thought that he should be no longer there in case a league, offensive and defensive, had in the end to be made with Mrs. Colwood for the handling of cousins. It was quite clear that Miss Fanny was a vulgar little minx, and that Beechcote would have no peace till it was rid of her. Meanwhile, the indefinable change which had come over his mother's face, during the preceding week, had escaped even the quick eyes of an affectionate son. Alas! for mothers—when Lalage appears!

Mr. Birch arrived to the minute, and when he was engaged in affable conversation with Diana, Fanny, last of the party—the door being ceremoniously thrown open by the butler—entered, with an air. Mr. Birch sprang effusively to his feet, and there was a noisy greeting between him and his travelling companion. The young man was slim, and effeminately good-looking. His frock-coat and gray trousers were new and immaculate; his small feet were encased in shining patent-leather boots, and his blue eyes gave the impression of having been carefully matched with his tie. He was evidently delighted to find himself at Beechcote, and it might have been divined that there was a spice of malice in his pleasure. The Vavasours had always snubbed him; Miss Mallory herself had not been over-polite to him on one or two occasions; but her cousin was a "stunner," and,

secure in Fanny's exuberant favor, he made himself quite at home. Placed on Diana's left at table, he gave her much voluble information about her neighbors, mostly ill-natured; he spoke familiarly of "that clever chap Marsham," as of a politician who owed his election for the division entirely to the good offices of Mr. Fred Birch's firm, and described Lady Lucy as "an old dear," though very "frowsty" in her ideas. He was strongly of opinion that Marsham should find an heiress as soon as possible, for there was no saying how "long the old lady would see him out of his money," and everybody knew that at present "she kept him beastly short." "As for me," the speaker wound up, with an engaging and pensive *naïveté*, "I've talked to him till I'm tired."

At last he was headed away from Tallyn and its owners, only to fall into a rapturous debate with Fanny over a racing bet which seemed to have been offered and taken on the journey which first made them acquainted. Fanny had lost, but the young man gallantly excused her.

"No—no, couldn't think of it! Not till next time. Then—my word!—I'll come down upon you—won't I? Teach you to know your way about—eh?"

Loud laughter from Fanny, who professed to know her way about already. They exchanged "tips"—until at last Mr. Birch, lost in admiration of his companion, pronounced her a "ripper"—he had never yet met a lady so well up—"why, you know as much as a man!"

Dr. Roughsedge meanwhile observed the type. The father, an old-fashioned steady-going solicitor, had sent the son to expensive schools, and allowed him two years at Oxford, until the College had politely requested the youth's withdrawal. The business was long established,

and had been sound. This young man had now been a partner in it for two years, and the same period had seen the rise to eminence of another and hitherto obscure firm in the county town. Mr. Fred Birch spoke contemptuously of the rival firm as "smugs"; but the district was beginning to intrust its wills and mortgages to the "smugs" with a sad and increasing alacrity.

There were, indeed, some secret discomforts in the young man's soul; and while he sported with Fanny he did not forget business. The tenant of Beechcote was, *ipso facto*, of some social importance, and Diana was reported to be rich; the Roughsedges also, though negligible financially, were not without influence in high places; and the doctor was governor of an important grammar-school recently revived and reorganized, wherewith the Birches would have been glad to be officially connected. He therefore made himself agreeable.

"You read, sir, a great deal?" he said to the doctor, with a professional change of voice.

The doctor, who, like most great men, was a trifle greedy, was silently enjoying a dish of oysters delicately rolled in bacon. He looked up at his questioner.

"A great deal, Mr. Birch."

"Everything, in fact?"

"Everything—except, of course, what is indispensable."

Mr. Birch looked puzzled.

"I heard of you from the Duchess, doctor. She says you are one of the most learned men in England."

"The Duchess?" The doctor screwed up his eyes and looked round the table.

Mr. Birch, with complacency, named the wife of a neighboring potentate who owned half the county.

"Don't know her," said the doctor—"don't know

her; and—excuse the barbarity—don't wish to know her."

"Oh, but so charming!" cried Mr. Birch — "and so kind!"

The doctor shook his head, and declared that great ladies were not to his taste. "Poodles, sir, poodles! 'fed on cream and muffins!'—there is no trusting them."

"Poodles!" said Fanny, in astonishment. "Why are duchesses like poodles?"

The doctor bowed to her.

"I give it up, Miss Merton. Ask Sydney Smith."

Fanny was mystified, and the sulky look appeared.

"Well, I know I should like to be a duchess. Why shouldn't one want to be a duchess?"

"Why not indeed?" said the doctor, helping himself to another oyster. "That's why they exist."

"I suppose you're teasing," said Fanny, rather crossly.

"I am quite incapable of it," protested the doctor. "Shall we not all agree that duchesses exist for the envy and jealousy of mankind?"

"Womankind?" put in Diana. The doctor smiled at her, and finished his oyster. Brave child! Had that odious young woman been behaving in character that morning? He would like to have the dealing with her! As for Diana, her face reminded him of Cowper's rose "just washed by a shower"—delicately fresh—yet eloquent of some past storm.—Good Heavens! Where was that fellow Marsham? Philandering with politics?—when there was this flower for the gathering!

Luncheon was half-way through when a rattling sound of horses' hoofs outside drew the attention of the table.

"Somebody else coming to lunch," said Mr. Birch. "Sorry for 'em, Miss Mallory. We haven't left 'em much. You've done us so uncommon well."

Diana herself looked in some alarm round the table.

"Plenty, my dear lady, plenty!" said the doctor, on her other hand. "Cold beef, and bread and cheese—what does any mortal want more? Don't disturb yourself."

Diana wondered who the visitors might be. The butler entered.

"Sir James Chide, ma'am, and Miss Drake. They have ridden over from Overton Park, and didn't think it was so far. They told me to say they didn't wish to disturb you at luncheon, and might they have a cup of coffee?"

Diana excused herself, and hurried out. Mr. Birch explained at length to Mrs. Colwood and Fanny that Overton Park belonged to the Judge, Sir William Felton; that Sir James Chide was often there; and no doubt Miss Drake had been invited for the ball of the night before; awfully smart affair!—the coming-out ball of the youngest daughter.

"Who is Miss Drake?" asked Fanny, thinking enviously of the ball, to which she had not been invited. Mr. Birch turned to her with confidential jocosity.

"Lady Lucy Marsham's cousin; and it is generally supposed that she might by now have been something else but for—"

He nodded toward the chair at the head of the table which Diana had left vacant.

"Whatever do you mean?" said Fanny. The Marshams to her were, so far, mere shadows. They represented rich people on the horizon whom Diana selfishly wished to keep to herself.

"I'm telling tales, I declare I am!" said Mr. Birch. "Haven't you seen Mr. Oliver Marsham yet, Miss Merton?"

"No. I don't know anything about him."

"Ah!" said Mr. Birch, smiling, and peeling an apple with deliberation.

Fanny flushed.

"Is there anything up—between him and Diana?" she said in his ear.

Mr. Birch smiled again.

"I saw old Mr. Vavasour the other day—clients of ours, you understand. A close-fisted old boy, Miss Merton. They imagined they'd get a good deal out of your cousin. But not a bit of it. Oliver Marsham does all her business for her. The Vavasours don't like it, I can tell you."

"I haven't seen either him or Lady Lucy—is that her name?—since I came."

"Let me see. You came about a fortnight ago—just when Parliament reassembled. Mr. Marsham is our member. He and Lady Lucy went up to town the day before Parliament met."

"And what about Miss Drake?"

"Ah!—poor Miss Drake!" Mr. Birch raised a humorous eyebrow. "Those little things will happen, won't they? It was just at Christmas, I understand, that your cousin paid her first visit to Tallyn. A man who was shooting there told me all about it."

"And Miss Drake was there too?"

Mr. Birch nodded.

"And Diana cut her out?" said Fanny, bending toward him eagerly.

Mr. Birch smiled again. Voices were heard in the

hall, but before the new guests entered, the young man put up a finger to his lips:

"Don't you quote me, please, Miss Merton. But, I can tell you, your cousin's very high up in the running just now. And Oliver Marsham will have twenty thousand a year some day if he has a penny. Miss Mallory hasn't told you anything—hasn't she? Ha—ha! Still waters, you know—still waters!"

A few minutes later Sir James Chide was seated between Diana and Fanny Merton, Mr. Birch having obligingly vacated his seat and passed to the other side of the table, where his attempts at conversation were coldly received by Miss Drake. That young lady dazzled the eyes of Fanny, who sat opposite to her. The closely fitting habit and black riding-hat gave to her fine figure and silky wealth of hair the maximum of effect. Fanny perfectly understood that only money and fashion could attain to Miss Drake's costly simplicity. She envied her from the bottom of her heart; she would have given worlds to see the dress in which she had figured at the ball. Miss Drake, no doubt, went to two or three balls a week, and could spend anything she liked upon her clothes.

Yet Diana had cut her out—Diana was to carry off the prize! Twenty thousand a year! Fanny's mind was in a ferment—the mind of a raw and envious provincial, trained to small ambitions and hungry desires. Half an hour before, she had been writing a letter home, in a whirl of delight and self-glorification. The money Diana had promised would set the whole family on its legs, and Fanny had stipulated that after the debts were paid she was to have a clear, cool hundred for her own

pocket, and no nonsense about it. It was she who had done it all, and if it hadn't been for her, they might all have gone to the workhouse. But now her success was to her as dross. The thought of Diana's future wealth and glory produced in her a feeling which was an acute physical distress. So Diana was to be married!—and to the great *parti* of the neighborhood! Fanny already saw her in the bridal white, surrounded by glittering bridesmaids; and a churchful of titled people, bowing before her as she passed in state, like poppies under a breeze.

And Diana had never said a word to her about it—to her own cousin! Nasty, close, mean ways! Fanny was not good enough for Tallyn—oh no! *She* was asked to Beechcote when there was nothing going on—or next to nothing—and one might yawn one's self to sleep with dulness from morning till night. But as soon as she was safely packed off, then there would be fine times, no doubt; the engagement would be announced; the presents would begin to come in; the bridesmaids would be chosen. But she would get nothing out of it—not she; she would not be asked to be bridesmaid. She was not genteel enough for Diana.

Diana—*Diana!*—the daughter—

Fanny's whole nature gathered itself as though for a spring upon some prey, at once tempting and exasperating. In one short fortnight the inbred and fated antagonism between the two natures had developed itself—on Fanny's side—to the point of hatred. In the depths of her being she knew that Diana had yearned to love her, and had not been able. That failure was not her crime, but Diana's.

Fanny looked haughtily round the table. How many

of them knew what she knew? Suddenly a name recurred to her!—the name announced by the butler and repeated by Mr. Birch. At the moment she had been thinking of other things; it had roused no sleeping associations. But now the obscure under-self sent it echoing through the brain. Fanny caught her breath. The sudden excitement made her head swim.—She turned and looked at the white-haired elderly man sitting between her and Diana.

Sir James Chide!

Memories of the common gossip in her home, of the talk of the people on the steamer, of pages in that volume of *Famous Trials* she had studied on the voyage with such a close and unsavory curiosity danced through the girl's consciousness. Well, *he* knew! No good pretending there. And he came to see Diana—and still Diana knew nothing! Mrs. Colwood must simply be telling lies—silly lies! Fanny glanced at her with contempt.

Yet so bewildered was she that when Sir James addressed her, she stared at him in what seemed a fit of shyness. And when she began to talk it was at random, for her mind was in a tumult. But Sir James soon divined her. Vulgarity, conceit, ill-breeding—the great lawyer detected them in five minutes' conversation. Nor were they unexpected; for he was well acquainted with Miss Fanny's origins. Yet the perception of them made the situation still more painfully interesting to him, and no less mysterious than before. For he saw no substantial change in it; and he was, in truth, no less perplexed than Fanny. If certain things had happened in consequence of Miss Merton's advent, neither he nor any other guest would be sitting at Diana Mallory's table

that day; of that he was morally certain. Therefore, they had not happened.

He returned with a redoubled tenderness of feeling to his conversation with Diana. He had come to Overton for the Sunday, at great professional inconvenience, for nothing in the world but that he must pay this visit to Beechcote; and he had approached the house with dread—dread lest he should find a face stricken with the truth. That dread was momentarily lifted, for in those beautiful dark eyes of Diana innocence and ignorance were still written; but none the less he trembled for her; he saw her as he had seen her at Tallyn, a creature doomed, and consecrate to pain. Why, in the name of justice and pity, had her father done this thing? So it is that a man's love, for lack of a little simple courage and common-sense, turns to cruelty.

Poor, poor child!—At first sight he, like the Roughsedges, had thought her pale and depressed. Then he had given his message. "Marsham has arrived!—turned up at Overton a couple of hours ago—and told us to say he would follow us here after luncheon. He wired to Lady Felton this morning to ask if she would take him in for the Sunday. Some big political meeting he had for tonight is off. Lady Lucy stays in town—and Tallyn is shut up. But Lady Felton was, of course, delighted to get him. He arrived about noon. Civility to his hostess kept him to luncheon—then he pursues us!"

Since then!—no lack of sparkle in the eyes or color in the cheek! Yet even so, to Sir James's keen sense, there was an increase, a sharpening, in Diana's personality, of the wistful, appealing note, which had been always touching, always perceptible, even through the radiant days of her Tallyn visit.

Ah, well!—like Dr. Roughsedge, only with a far deeper urgency, he, too, for want of any better plan, invoked the coming lover. In God's name, let Marsham take the thing into his own hands!—stand on his own feet!—dissipate a nightmare which ought never to have arisen—and gather the girl to his heart.

Meanwhile Fanny's attention—and the surging anger of her thoughts—were more and more directed upon the girl with the fair hair opposite. A natural bond of sympathy seemed somehow to have arisen between her and this Miss Drake—Diana's victim. Alicia Drake, looking up, was astonished, time after time, to find herself stared at by the common-looking young woman across the table, who was, she understood, Miss Mallory's cousin. What dress, and what manners! One did not often meet that kind of person in society. She wished Oliver joy of his future relations.

In the old panelled drawing-room the coffee was circulating. Sir James was making friends with Mrs. Colwood, whose gentle looks and widow's dress appealed to him. Fanny, Miss Drake, and Mr. Birch made a group by the fireplace; Mr. Birch was posing as an authority on the drama; Fanny, her dark eyes fixed upon Alicia, was not paying much attention; and Alicia, with ill-concealed impatience, was yawning behind her glove. Hugh Roughsedge was examining the Donatello photograph.

"Do you like it?" said Diana, standing beside him. She was conscious of having rather neglected him at lunch, and there was a dancing something in her own heart which impelled her to kindness and compunction. Was not the good, inarticulate youth, too, going out into

the wilds, his life in his hands, in the typical English way? The soft look in her eyes which expressed this mingled feeling did not mislead the recipient. He had overheard Sir James Chide's message; he understood her.

Presently, Mrs. Roughsedge, seeing that it was a sunny day and the garden looked tempting, asked to be allowed to inspect a new greenhouse that Diana was putting up. The door leading out of the drawing-room to the moat and the formal garden was thrown open; cloaks and hats were brought, and the guests streamed out.

"You are not coming?" said Hugh Roughsedge to Diana.

At this question he saw a delicate flush, beyond her control, creep over her cheek and throat.

"I—I am expecting Mr. Marsham," she said. "Perhaps I ought to stay."

Sir James Chide looked at his watch.

"He should be here any minute. We will overtake you, Captain Roughsedge."

Hugh went off beside Mrs. Colwood. Well, well, it was all plain enough! It was only a fortnight since the Marshams had gone up to town for the Parliamentary season. And here he was, again upon the scene. Impossible, evidently, to separate them longer. Let them only get engaged, and be done with it! He stalked on beside Mrs. Colwood, tongue-tied and miserable.

Meanwhile, Sir James lingered with Diana. "A charming old place!" he said, looking about him. "But Marsham tells me the Vavasours have been odious."

"We have got the better of them! Mr. Marsham helped me."

"He has an excellent head, has Oliver. This year he

will have special need of it. It will be a critical time for him."

Diana gave a vague assent. She had, in truth, two recent letters from Marsham in her pocket at that moment, giving a brilliant and minute account of the Parliamentary situation. But she hid the fact, warm and close, like a brooding bird; only drawing on her companion to talk politics, that she might hear Marsham's name sometimes, and realize the situation Marsham had described to her, from another point of view.—And all the time her ear listened for the sound of hoofs, and for the front door bell.

At last! The peal echoed through the old house. Sir James rose, and, instinctively, Diana rose too. Was there a smile—humorous and tender—in the lawyer's blue eyes?

"I'll go and finish my cigarette out-of-doors. Such a tempting afternoon!"

And out he hurried, before Diana could stop him. She remained standing, with soft hurrying breath, looking out into the garden. On a lower terrace she saw Fanny and Alicia Drake walking together, and could not help a little laugh of amusement that seemed to come out of a heart of content. Then the door opened, and Marsham was there.

CHAPTER IX

MARSHAM'S first feeling, as he advanced into the room, and, looking round him, saw that Diana was alone, was one of acute physical pleasure. The old room with its mingling of color, at once dim and rich; the sunlit garden through the casement windows; the scent of the logs burning on the hearth, and of the hyacinths and narcissus with which the warm air was perfumed; the signs everywhere of a woman's life and charm; all these first impressions leaped upon him, aiding the remembered spell which had recalled him—hot-foot and eager—from London, to this place, on the very first opportunity.

And if her surroundings were poetic, how much more so was the girl-figure itself!—the slender form, the dark head, and that shrinking joy which spoke in her gesture, in the movement she made toward him across the room. She checked it at once, but not before a certain wildness in it had let loose upon him a rush of delight.

"Sir James explained?" he said, as he took her hand.

"Yes. I had no notion you would be here—this week-end."

"Nor had I—till last night. Then an appointment broken down—and—*me voici!*"

"You stay over to-morrow?"

"Of course! But it is absurd that the Feltons should be five miles away!"

She stammered:

"It is a charming ride."

"But too long!—One does not want to lose time."

She was now sitting; and he beside her. Mechanically she had taken up some embroidery—to shield her eyes. He examined the reds and blues of the pattern, the white fingers, the bending cheek. Suddenly, like Sir James Chide or Hugh Roughsedge, he was struck with a sense of change. The Dian look which matched her name, the proud gayety and frankness of it, were somehow muffled and softened. And altogether her aspect was a little frail and weary. The perception brought with it an appeal to the protective strength of the man. What were her cares? Trifling, womanish things! He would make her confess them; and then conjure them away!

"You have your cousin with you?"

"Yes."

"She will make you a long visit?"

"Another week or two, I think."

"You are a believer in family traditions?—But of course you are!"

"Why 'of course'?' Her color had sparkled again, but the laugh was not spontaneous.

"I see that you are in love with even your furthest kinsmen—you must be—being an Imperialist! Now I am frankly bored by my kinsmen—near and far."

"All the same—you ask their help!"

"Oh yes, in war; pure self-interest on both sides."

"You have been preaching this in the House of Commons?"

The teasing had answered. No more veiling of the eyes!

"No—I have made no speeches. Next week, in the Vote of Censure debate, I shall get my chance."

"To talk Little Englandism? Alack!"

The tone was soft—it ended in a sigh.

"Does it really trouble you?"

She was looking down at her work. Her fingers drew the silk out and in—a little at random. She shook her head slightly, without reply.

"I believe it does," he said, gently, still smiling. "Well, when I make my speech, I shall remember that."

She looked up suddenly. Their eyes met full. On her just parted lips the words she had meant to say remained unspoken. Then a murmur of voices from the garden reached them, as though some one approached. Marsham rose.

"Shall we go into the garden? I ought to speak to Robins. How is he getting on?"

Robins was the new head gardener, appointed on Marsham's recommendation.

"Excellently." Diana had also risen. "I will get my hat."

He opened the door for her. Hang those people outside! But for them she would have been already in his arms.

Left to himself, he walked to and fro, restless and smiling. No more self-repression—no more politic delay! The great moment of life—grasped—captured at last! He in his turn understood the Faust-cry—"Linger awhile!—thou art so fair!" Only let him pierce to the heart of it—realize it, covetously, to the full! All the ordinary worldly motives were placated and at rest; due sacrifice had been done to them; they teased no more. Upgathered and rolled away, like storm-winds from the sea, they had left a shining and a festal wave for love to

venture on. Let him only yield himself—feel the full swell of the divine force!

He moved to the window, and looked out.

Birch!—What on earth brought that creature to Beechcote. His astonishment was great, and perhaps in the depths of his mind there emerged the half-amused perception of a feminine softness and tolerance which masculine judgment must correct. She did not know how precious she was; and that it must not be made too easy for the common world to approach her. All that was picturesque and important, of course, in the lower classes; labor men, Socialists, and the like. But not vulgar half-baked fellows, who meant nothing politically, and must yet be treated like gentlemen. Ah! There were the Roughsedges—the Captain not gone yet?—Sir James and Mrs. Colwood—nice little creature, that companion—they would find some use for her in the future. And on the lower terrace, Alicia Drake, and—that girl? He laughed, amusing himself with the thought of Alicia's plight. Alicia, the arrogant, the fastidious! The odd thing was that she seemed to be absorbed in the conversation that was going on. He saw her pause at the end of the terrace, look round her, and deliberately lead the way down a long grass path, away from the rest of the party. Was the cousin good company, after all?

Diana returned. A broad black hat, and sables which had been her father's last gift to her, provided the slight change in surroundings which pleases the eye and sense of a lover. And as a man brought up in wealth, and himself potentially rich, he found it secretly agreeable that costly things became her. There should be no lack of them in the future.

They stepped out upon the terrace. At sight of them

the Roughsedges approached, while Mr. Fred Birch lagged behind to inspect the sundial. After a few words' conversation, Marsham turned resolutely away.

"Miss Mallory wants to show me a new gardener."

The old doctor smiled at his wife. Hugh Roughsedge watched the departing figures. Excellently matched, he must needs admit, in aspect and in height. Was it about to happen?—or had it already happened? He braced himself, soldierlike, to the inevitable.

"You know Mr. Birch," said Diana to her companion, as they descended to the lower terrace, and passed not very far from that gentleman.

"I just know him," said Marsham, carelessly, and bestowed a nod in the direction of the solicitor.

"Had he not something to do with your election?" said Diana, astonished.

"My election?" cried Marsham. Then he laughed. "I suppose he has been drawing the long bow, as usual. Am I impertinent?—or may I ask, how you came to know him?"

He looked at her smiling. Diana colored.

"My cousin Fanny made acquaintance with him—in the train."

"I see. Here are our two cousins—coming to meet us. Will you introduce me?"

For Fanny and Miss Drake were now returning slowly along the gravel path which led to the kitchen garden. The eyes of both girls were fixed on the pair advancing toward them. Alicia was no longer impassive or haughty. Like her companion, she appeared to have been engaged in an intimate and absorbing conversation. Diana could not help looking at her in a vague surprise as she paused in front of them. But she addressed herself to her cousin.

"Fanny, I want to introduce Mr. Marsham to you."

Fanny Merton held out her hand, staring a little oddly at the gentleman presented to her. Alicia meanwhile was looking at Diana, while she spoke—with emphasis—to Marsham.

"Could you order my horse, Oliver? I think we ought to be going back."

"Would you mind asking Sir James?" Marsham pointed to the upper terrace. "I have something to see to in the garden."

Diana said hurriedly that Mrs. Colwood would send the order to the stables, and that she herself would not be long. Alicia took no notice of this remark. She still looked at Oliver.

"You'll come back with us, won't you?"

Marsham flushed. "I have only just arrived," he said, rather sharply. "Please don't wait for me.—Shall we go on?" he said, turning to Diana.

They walked on. As Diana paused at the iron gate which closed the long walk, she looked round her involuntarily, and saw that Alicia and Fanny were now standing on the lower terrace, gazing after them. It struck her as strange and rude, and she felt the slight shock she had felt several times already, both in her intercourse with Fanny and in her acquaintance with Miss Drake—as of one unceremoniously jostled or repulsed.

Marsham meanwhile was full of annoyance. That Alicia should still treat him in that domestic, possessive way—and in Diana's presence—was really intolerable. It must be stopped.

He paused on the other side of the gate.

"After all, I am not in a mood to see Robins to-day. Look!—the light is going. Will you show me the path

on to the hill? You spoke to me once of a path you were fond of."

She tried to laugh.

"You take Robins for granted?"

"I am quite indifferent to his virtues—even his vices! This chance—is too precious. I have so much to say to you."

She led the way in silence. The hand which held up her dress from the mire trembled a little unseen. But her sense of the impending crisis had given her more rather than less dignity. She bore her dark head finely, with that unconscious long-descended instinct of the woman, waiting to be sued.

They found a path beyond the garden, winding up through a leafless wood. Marsham talked of indifferent things, and she answered him with spirit, feeling it all, so far, a queer piece of acting. Then they emerged on the side of the hill beside a little basin in the chalk, where a gnarled thorn or two, an overhanging beech, and a bed of withered heather, made a kind of intimate, furnished place, which appealed to the passer-by.

"Here is the sunset," said Marsham, looking round him. "Are you afraid to sit a little?"

He took a light overcoat he had been carrying over his arm and spread it on the heather. She protested that it was winter, and coats were for wearing. He took no notice, and she tamely submitted. He placed her regally, with an old thorn for support and canopy; and then he stood a moment beside her gazing westward.

They looked over undulations of the chalk, bare stubble fields and climbing woods, bathed in the pale gold of a February sunset. The light was pure and wan—the resting earth shone through it gently yet

austerely; only the great woods darkly massed on the horizon gave an accent of mysterious power to a scene in which Nature otherwise showed herself the tamed and homely servant of men. Below were the trees of Beechcote, the gray walls, and the windows touched with a last festal gleam.

Suddenly Marsham dropped down beside her.

"I see it all with new eyes," he said, passionately. "I have lived in this country from my childhood; and I never saw it before! Diana!—"

He raised her hand, which only faintly resisted; he looked into her eyes. She had grown very pale—enchantingly pale. There was in her the dim sense of a great fulfilment; the fulfilment of Nature's promise to her; implicit in her woman's lot from the beginning.

"Diana!—" the low voice searched her heart—"You know—what I have come to say? I meant to have waited a little longer—I was afraid!—but I couldn't wait—it was beyond my strength. Diana!—come to me, darling!—be my wife!"

He kissed the hand he held. His eyes beseeched; and into hers, widely fixed upon him, had sprung tears—the tears of life's supremest joy. Her lip trembled.

"I'm not worthy!" she said, in a whisper—'I'm not worthy!"

"Foolish Diana!—Darling, foolish Diana!—Give me my answer!"

And now he held both hands, and his confident smile dazzled her.

"I—" Her voice broke. She tried again, still in a whisper. "I will be everything to you—that a woman can."

At that he put his arm round her, and she let him

take that first kiss, in which she gave him her youth, her life—all that she had and was. Then she withdrew herself, and he saw her brow contract, and her mouth.

"I know!"—he said, tenderly—"I know! Dear, I think he would have been glad. He and I made friends from the first."

She plucked at the heather beside her, trying for composure. "He would have been so glad of a son—so glad—"

And then, by contrast with her own happiness, the piteous memory of her father overcame her; and she cried a little, hiding her eyes against Marsham's shoulder.

"There!" she said, at last, withdrawing herself, and brushing the tears away. "That's all—that's done with—except in one's heart. Did—did Lady Lucy know?"

She looked at him timidly. Her aspect had never been more lovely. Tears did not disfigure her, and as compared with his first remembrance of her, there was now a touching significance, an incomparable softness in all she said and did, which gave him a bewildering sense of treasures to come, of joys for the gathering.

Suddenly — involuntarily — there flashed through his mind the recollection of his first love-passage with Alicia—how she had stung him on, teased, and excited him. He crushed it at once, angrily.

As to Lady Lucy, he smilingly declared that she had no doubt guessed something was in the wind.

"I have been 'gey ill to live with' since we got up to town. And when the stupid meeting I had promised to speak at was put off, my mother thought I had gone off my head—from my behavior. 'What are you going to the Feltons' for?—You never care a bit about them.' So at last I brought her the map and made her look at it

—'Felton Park to Brinton, 3 miles—Haylesford, 4 miles —Beechcote, 2 miles and ½—Beechcote Manor, half a mile —total, ten miles.'—'Oliver!'—she got so red!—'you are going to propose to Miss Mallory!' 'Well, mother!—and what have you got to say?' So then she smiled—and kissed me—and sent you messages—which I'll give you when there's time. My mother is a rather formidable person—no one who knew her would ever dream of taking her consent to anything for granted; but this time"—his laugh was merry—"I didn't even think of asking it!"

"I shall love her—dearly," murmured Diana.

"Yes, because you won't be afraid of her. Her standards are hardly made for this wicked world. But you'll hold her—you'll manage her. If you'd said 'No' to me, she would have felt cheated of a daughter."

"I'm afraid Mrs. Fotheringham won't like it," said Diana, ruefully, letting herself be gathered again into his arms.

"My sister? I don't know what to say about Isabel, dearest—unless I parody an old saying. She and I have never agreed—except in opinion. We have been on the same side—and in hot opposition—since our childhood. No—I dare say she will be thorny! Why did you fight me so well, little rebel?"

He looked down into her dark eyes, revelling in their sweetness, and in the bliss of her surrendered beauty. If this was not his first proposal, it was his first true passion—of that he was certain.

She released herself—rosy—and still thinking of Mrs. Fotheringham. "Oliver!"—she laid her hand shyly on his—"neither she nor you will want me to stifle what I think—to deny what I do really believe? I dare say a

woman's politics aren't worth much"—she laughed and sighed.

"I say!—don't take that line with Isabel!"

"Well, mine probably aren't worth much—but they are mine—and papa taught them me—and I can't give them up."

"What 'll you do, darling?—canvass against me?" He kissed her hand again.

"No—but I *can't* agree with you!"

"Of course you can't. Which of us, I wonder, will shake the other? How do you know that I'm not in a blue fright for my principles?"

"You'll explain to me?—you'll not despise me?" she said, softly, bending toward him; "I'll always, always try and understand."

Who could resist an attitude so feminine, yet so loyal, at once so old and new? Marsham felt himself already attacked by the poison of Toryism, and Diana, with a happy start, envisaged horizons that her father never knew, and questions where she had everything to learn.

Hand in hand, trembling still under the thrill of the moment which had fused their lives, they fell into happy discursive talk: of the Tallyn visit — of her thoughts and his—of what Lady Lucy and Mr. Ferrier had said, or would say. In the midst of it the fall of temperature, which came with the sunset, touched them, and Marsham sprang up with the peremptoriness of a new relationship, insisting that he must take her home out of the chilly dusk. As they stood lingering in the hollow, unwilling to leave the gnarled thorns, the heather-carpet, and the glow of western light—symbols to them henceforth that they too, in their turn, amid the endless generations, had drunk the mystic cup, and shared the

sacred feast—Diana perceived some movement far below, on the open space in front of Beechcote. A little peering through the twilight showed them two horses with their riders leaving the Beechcote door.

"Oh! your cousin—and Sir James!" cried Diana, in distress, "and I haven't said good-bye—"

"You will see them soon again. And I shall carry them the news to-night."

"Will you? Shall I allow it?"

Marsham laughed; he caught her hand again, slipped it possessively within his left arm, and held it there as they went slowly down the path. Diana could not think with any zest of Alicia and her reception of the news. A succession of trifles had shown her quite clearly that Alicia was not her friend; why, she did not know. She remembered many small advances on her own part.

But at the mention of Sir James Chide, her face lit up.

"He has been so kind to me!" she said, looking up into Marsham's face—"so very kind!"

Her eyes showed a touch of passion; the passion that some natures can throw into gratitude; whether for little or much. Marsham smiled.

"He fell in love with you! Yes—he is a dear old boy. One can well imagine that he has had a romance!"

"Has he?"

"It is always said that he was in love with a woman whom he defended on a charge of murder."

Diana exclaimed.

"He had met her when they were both very young, and lost his heart to her. Then she married and he lost sight of her. He accepted a brief in this murder case, ten years later, not knowing her identity, and they met

for the first time when he went to see her with her solicitor in prison."

Diana breathlessly asked for the rest of the story.

"He defended her magnificently. It was a shocking case. The sentence was commuted, but she died almost immediately. They say Sir James has never got over it."

Diana pondered; her eyes dim.

"How one would like to do something for him!—to give him pleasure!"

Marsham caressed her hand.

"So you shall, darling. He shall be one of our best friends. But he mustn't make Ferrier jealous."

Diana smiled happily. She looked forward to all the new ties of kindred or friendship that Marsham was to bring her—modestly indeed, yet in the temper of one who feels herself spiritually rich and capable of giving.

"I shall love all your friends," she said, with a bright look. "I'm glad you have so many!"

"Does that mean that you've felt rather lonely sometimes? Poor darling!" he said, tenderly, "it must have been solitary often at Portofino."

"Oh no—I had papa." Then her truthfulness overcame her. "I don't mean to say I didn't often want friends of my own age—girl friends especially."

"You can't have them now!"—he said, passionately, as they paused at a wicket-gate, under a yew-tree. "I want you all—all—to myself." And in the shadow of the yew he put his arms round her again, and their hearts beat together.

But our nature moves within its own inexorable limits. In Diana, Marsham's touch, Marsham's embrace awakened that strange mingled happiness, that happiness reared and based on tragedy, which the pure and sensitive

feel in the crowning moments of life. Love is tortured by its own intensity; and the thought of death strikes through the experience which means the life of the race. As her lips felt Marsham's kiss, she knew, as generations of women have known before her, that life could give her no more; and she also knew that it was transiency and parting that made it so intolerably sweet.

"Till death us do part," she said to herself. And in the intensity of her submission to the common lot she saw down the years the end of what had now begun—herself lying quiet and blessed, in the last sleep, her dead hand in Marsham's.

"Why must we go home?" he said, discontentedly, as he released her. "One turn more!—up the avenue! There is light enough yet!"

She yielded weakly; pacifying her social conscience by the half-penitent remark that Mrs. Colwood would have said good-bye to her guests, and that—she—she supposed they would soon have to know.

"Well, as I want you to marry me in six weeks," said Marsham, joyously, "I suppose they will."

"Six weeks!" She gasped. "Oh, how unreasonable!"

"Dearest!—A fortnight would do for frocks. And whom have we to consult but ourselves? I know you have no near relations. As for cousins, it doesn't take long to write them a few notes, and ask them to the wedding."

Diana sighed.

"My only cousins are the Mertons. They are all in Barbadoes but Fanny."

Her tone changed a little. In her thoughts, she added, hurriedly: "I sha'n't have any bridesmaids!"

Marsham, discreetly, made no reply. Personally, he hoped that Miss Merton's engagements might take her safely back to Barbadoes before the wedding-day. But if not, he and his would no doubt know how to deal with her—civilly and firmly—as people must learn to deal with their distasteful relations.

Meanwhile on Diana's mind there had descended a sudden cloud of thought, dimming the ecstasy of her joy. The February day was dying in a yellowish dusk, full of beauty. They were walking along a narrow avenue of tall limes which skirted the Beechcote lands, and took them past the house. Above their heads the trees met in a brown-and-purple tracery of boughs, and on their right, through the branches, they saw a pale full moon, throning it in a silver sky. The mild air, the movements of the birds, the scents from the earth and bushes spoke of spring; and suddenly Diana perceived the gate leading to the wood where that very morning the subtle message of the changing year had come upon her, rending and probing. A longing to tell Marsham all her vague troubles rose in her, held back by a natural shrinking. But the longing prevailed, quickened by the loyal sense that she must quickly tell him all she knew about herself and her history, since there was nobody else to tell him.

"Oliver!"—she began, hurriedly—"I ought to tell you —I don't think you know. My name wasn't Mallory to begin with—my father took that name."

Marsham gave a little start.

"Dear—how surprising!—and how interesting! Tell me all you can—from the year One."

He smiled upon her, with a sparkling look that asked for all her history. But secretly he had been conscious of

a shock. Lately he had made a few inquiries about the Welsh Mallorys. And the answers had been agreeable; though the old central stock of the name, to which he presumed Diana belonged, was said to be extinct. No doubt—so he had reflected—it had come to an end in her father.

"Mallory was the name of my father's mother. He took it for various reasons—I never quite understood—and I know a good deal of property came to him. But his original name—my name—was Sparling."

"Sparling!" A pause. "And have you any Sparling relations."

"No. They all died out—I think—but I know so little!—when I was small. However, I have a box of Sparling papers which I have never examined. Perhaps—some day—we might look at them together."

Her voice shook a little.

"You have never looked at them?"

"Never."

"But why, dearest?"

"It always seemed to make papa so unhappy—anything to do with his old name. Oliver!"—she turned upon him suddenly, and for the first time she clung to him, hiding her face against his shoulder—"Oliver!—I don't know what made him unhappy—I don't know why he changed his name. Sometimes I think—there may have been some terrible thing between him—and my mother."

He put his arm round her, close and tenderly.

"What makes you think that?" Then he whispered to her—"Tell your lover—your husband—tell him everything."

She shrank in delicious tremor from the great word,

and it was a few moments before she could collect her thoughts. Then she said—still resting against him in the dark—and in a low rapid voice, as though she followed the visions of an inner sense:

"She died when I was only four. I just remember—it is almost my first recollection of anything—seeing her carried up-stairs—" She broke off. "And oh! it's so strange!—"

"Strange? She was ill?"

"Yes, but—what I seem to remember never explains itself—and I did not dare to ask papa. She hadn't been with us—for a long time. Papa and I had been alone. Then one day I saw them carrying her up-stairs—my father and two nurses—I ran out before my nurse could catch me—and saw her—she was in her hat and cloak. I didn't know her, and when she called me, I ran away. Then afterward they took me in to see her in bed—two or three times—and I remember once"—Diana began to sob herself—"seeing her cry. She lay sobbing—and my father beside her; he held her hand—and I saw him hide his eyes upon it. They never noticed me; I don't know that they saw me. Then they told me she was dead—I saw her lying on the bed—and my nurse gave me some flowers to put beside her—some violets. They were the only flowers. I can see her still, lying there—with her hands closed over them."

She released herself from Marsham, and, with her hand in his, she drew him slowly along the path, while she went on speaking, with an effort indeed, yet with a marvellous sense of deliverance — after the silence of years. She described the entire seclusion of their life at Portofino.

"Papa never spoke to me of mamma, and I never

remember a picture of her. After his death I saw a closed locket on his breast for the first time. I would not have opened it for the world—I just kissed it—" Her voice broke again; but after a moment she quietly resumed. "He changed his name—I think—when I was about nine years old. I remember that somehow it seemed to give him comfort—he was more cheerful with me afterward—"

"And you have no idea what led him to go abroad?"

She shook her head. Marsham's changed and rapid tone had betrayed some agitation in the mind behind; but Diana did not notice it. In her story she had come to what, in truth, had been the determining and formative influence on her own life—her father's melancholy, and the mystery in which it had been enwrapped; and even the perceptions of love were for the moment blinded as the old tyrannous grief overshadowed her.

"His life"—she said, slowly—"seemed for years—one long struggle to bear — what was really — unbearable. Then when I was about nineteen there was a change. He no longer shunned people quite in the same way, and he took me to Egypt and India. We came across old friends of his whom I, of course, had never seen before; and I used to wonder at the way in which they treated him—with a kind of reverence—as though they would not have touched him roughly for the world. Then directly after we got home to the Riviera his illness began—"

She dwelt on the long days of dumbness, and her constant sense that he wished—in vain—to communicate something to her.

"He wanted something—and I could not give it him—could not even tell what it was. It was misery! One

day he managed to write: 'If you are in trouble, go to Riley & Bonner—ask them.' They were his solicitors, whom he had depended on from his boyhood. But since his death I have never wanted anything from them but a little help in business. They have been very good; but—I could not go and question them. If there was anything to know—papa had not been able to tell me —I did not want anybody else—to—"

Her voice dropped. Only half an hour since the flowering of life! What a change in both! She was pacing along slowly, her head thrown back; the oval of her face white among her furs, under the ghostly touch of the moonlight; a suggestion of something austere—finely remote—in her attitude and movement. His eyes were on the ground, his shoulders bent; she could not see his face.

"We must try and unravel it—together," he said, at last, with an effort. "Can you tell me your mother's name?"

"It was an old Staffordshire family. But she and papa met in America, and they married there. Her father died not long afterward, I think. And I have never heard of any relations but the one sister, Mrs. Merton. Her name was Wentworth. Oh!" It was an involuntary cry of physical pain.

"Diana!—Did I hurt your hand? my darling!"

The sudden tightness of his grip had crushed her fingers. She smiled at him, as he kissed them, in hasty remorse.

"And her Christian name?" he asked, in a low voice.

"Juliet."

There was a pause. They had turned back, and were walking toward the house. The air had grown much

colder; frosty stars were twinkling, and a chilly wind was blowing light clouds across the moon. The two figures moved slowly in and out of the bands of light and shadow which crossed the avenue.

Diana stopped suddenly.

"If there were something terrible to know!"—she said, trembling—"something which would make you ashamed of me!—"

Her tall slenderness bent toward him—she held out her hands piteously. Marsham's manhood asserted itself. He encircled her again with his strong arm, and she hid her face against him. The contact of her soft body, her fresh cheek, intoxicated him afresh. In the strength of his desire for her, it was as though he were fighting off black vultures of the night, forces of horror that threatened them both. He would not believe what yet he already knew to be true. The thought of his mother clamored at the door of his mind, and he would not open to it. In a reckless defiance of what had overtaken him, he poured out tender and passionate speech which gradually stilled the girl's tumult of memory and foreboding, and brought back the heaven of their first moment on the hill-side. Her own reserve broke down, and from her murmured words, her sweetness, her infinite gratitude, Marsham might divine still more fully the richness of that harvest which such a nature promised to a lover.

"I won't tell any one—but Muriel—till you have seen Lady Lucy," said Diana, as they approached the house, and found Marsham's horse waiting at the door.

He acquiesced, and it was arranged that he should

go up to town the following day, Sunday—see Lady Lucy—and return on the Monday.

Then he rode away, waving his hand through the darkness.

Marsham's horse carried him swiftly through country roads, where the moon made magic, and peace reigned. But the mind of the rider groped in confusion and despair, seeing no way out.

Only one definite purpose gathered strength—to throw himself on the counsel of Sir James Chide. Chide had known—from the beginning!

CHAPTER X

MARSHAM reached Felton Hall about six o'clock. The house, a large Georgian erection, belonging to pleasant easy-going people with many friends, was full of guests, and the thought of the large party which he must face at dinner and in the evening had been an additional weight in his burden during the long ride home.

No means of escaping it, or the gossip with regard to himself, which must, he knew, be raging among the guests!

That gossip had not troubled him when he had set forth in the early afternoon. Quite the contrary. It had amused him as he rode to Beechcote, full of confident hope, to think of announcing his engagement. What reason would there be for delay or concealment? He looked forward to the congratulations of old friends; the more the better.

The antithesis between "then" and "now" struck him sharply, as he dismounted. But for that last quarter of an hour with Diana, how jubilantly would he have entered the house! Ten minutes with Lady Felton — a dear, chattering woman! — and all would have been known. He pictured instinctively the joyous flutter in the house—the merry dinner—perhaps the toasts.

As it was, he slipped quietly into the house, hoping that his return might pass unnoticed. He was thankful to find no one about—the hall and drawing-room desert-

ed. The women had gone up to rest before dinner; the men had not long before come back muddy from hunting, and were changing clothes.

Where was Sir James Chide?

He looked into the smoking-room. A solitary figure was sitting by the fire. Sir James had a new novel beside him; but he was not reading, and his cigar lay half smoked on the ash-tray beside him.

He was gazing into the blaze, his head on his hand, and his quick start and turn as the door of the smoking-room opened showed him to be not merely thoughtful but expectant.

He sprang up.

"Is that you, Oliver?"

He came forward eagerly. He had known Marsham from a child, had watched his career, and formed a very shrewd opinion of his character. But how this supreme moment would turn—if, indeed, the supreme moment had arrived—Sir James had no idea.

Marsham closed the door behind him, and in the lamplight the two men looked at each other. Marsham's brow was furrowed, his cheeks pale. His eyes, restless and bright, interrogated his old friend. At the first glance Sir James understood. He thrust his hands into his pockets.

"You know?" he said, under his breath.

Marsham nodded.

"And you—have known it all along?"

"From the first moment, almost, that I set eyes on that poor child. Does *she* know? Have you broken it to her?"

The questions hurried on each other's heels. Marsham shook his head, and Sir James, turning away, made a sound that was almost a groan.

"You have proposed to her?"

"Yes."

"And she has accepted you?"

"Yes." Marsham walked to the mantel-piece, and hung over the fire.

Sir James watched him for a moment, twisting his mouth. Then he walked up to his companion and laid a hand on his arm.

"Stick it out, Oliver!" he said, breathing quick. "Stick it out! You'll have to fight—but she's worth it."

Marsham's hand groped for his. Sir James pressed it, and walked away again, his eyes on the carpet. When he came back, he said, shortly:

"You know your mother will resist it to the last?"

By this, Marsham had collected his forces, and as he turned to the lamplight, Sir James saw a countenance that reassured him.

"I have no hope of persuading her. It will have to be faced."

"No, I fear there is no hope. She sees all such things in a false light. Forgive me—we must both speak plainly. She will shudder at the bare idea of Juliet Sparling's daughter as your wife; she will think it means a serious injury to your career—in reality it does nothing of the sort—and she will regard it as her duty to assert herself."

"You and Ferrier must do all you can for me," said Marsham, slowly.

"We shall do everything we can, but I do not flatter myself it will be of the smallest use. And supposing we make no impression—what then?"

Marsham paused a moment; then looked up.

"You know the terms of my father's will? I am absolutely dependent on my mother. The allowance she

makes me at present is quite inadequate for a man in Parliament, and she could stop it to-morrow."

"You might have to give up Parliament?"

"I should very likely have to give up Parliament."

Sir James ruminated, and took up his half-smoked cigar for counsel.

"I can't imagine, Oliver, that your mother would push her opposition to quite that point. But, in any case, you have forgotten Miss Mallory's own fortune."

"It has never entered into my thoughts!" cried Marsham, with an emphasis which Sir James knew to be honest. "But, in any case, I cannot live upon my wife. If I could not find something to do, I should certainly give up politics."

His tone had become a little dry and bitter, his aspect gray.

Sir James surveyed him a moment—pondering.

"You will find plenty of ways out, Oliver—plenty! The sympathy of all the world will be with you. You have won a beautiful and noble creature. She has been brought up under a more than Greek fate. You will rescue her from it. You will show her how to face it—and how to conquer it."

A tremor swept across Marsham's handsome mouth. But the perplexity and depression in the face remained.

Sir James had a slight consciousness of rebuff. But it disappeared in his own emotion. He resumed:

"She ought to be told the story—perhaps with some omissions—at once. Her mother"—he spoke with a slow precision, forcing out the words—"was not a bad woman. If you like, I will break it to Miss Mallory. I am probably more intimately acquainted with the story than any one else now living."

Something in the tone, in the solemnity of the blue eyes, in the carriage of the gray head, touched Marsham to the quick. He laid a hand on his old friend's shoulder —affectionately—in mute thanks.

"Diana mentioned her father's solicitors—"

"I know"—interrupted Sir James—"Riley & Bonner —excellent fellows—both of them still living. They probably have all the records. And I shouldn't wonder if they have a letter—from Sparling. He *must* have made provision—for the occasion that has now arisen."

"A letter?—for Diana?"

Sir James nodded. "His behavior to her was a piece of moral cowardice, I suppose. I saw a good deal of him during the trial, of course, though it is years now since I lost all trace of him. He was a sensitive, shy fellow, wrapped up in his archæology, and very ignorant of the world—when it all happened. It tore him up by the roots. His life withered in a day."

Marsham flushed.

"He had no right to bring her up in this complete ignorance! He could not have done anything more cruel!—more fatal! No one knows what the effect may be upon her."

And with a sudden rush of passion through the blood, he seemed to hold her once more in his arms, he felt the warmth of her cheek on his; all her fresh and fragrant youth was present to him, the love in her voice, and in her proud eyes. He turned away, threw himself into a chair, and buried his face in his hands.

Sir James looked down upon him. Instead of sympathy, there was a positive lightening in the elder man's face—a gleam of satisfaction.

"Cheer up, old fellow!" he said, in a low voice. "You'll

bring her through. You stand by her, and you'll reap your reward. By Gad, there are many men who would envy you the chance!"

Marsham made no reply. Was it his silence that evoked in the mind of Sir James the figure which already held the mind of his companion?—the figure of Lady Lucy? He paced up and down, with the image before him—the spare form, resolutely erect, the delicate resolution of the face, the prim perfection of the dress, judged by the Quakerish standard of its owner. Lady Lucy almost always wore gloves — white or gray. In Sir James's mind the remembrance of them took a symbolic importance. What use in expecting the wearer of them to handle the blood and mire of Juliet Sparling's story with breadth and pity?

"Look here!" he said, coming to a sudden stop. "Let us decide at once on what is to be done. You said nothing to Miss Mallory?"

"Nothing. But she is already in some trouble and misgiving about the past. She is in the mood to inquire; she has been, I think, for some time. And, naturally, she wishes to hide nothing from me."

"She will write to Riley & Bonner," said Sir James, quietly. "She will probably write to-night. They may take steps to acquaint her with her history—or they may not. It depends. Meanwhile, who else is likely to know anything about the engagement?"

"Diana was to tell Mrs. Colwood—her companion; no one else."

"Nice little woman! — all right there! But"— Sir James gave a slight start—"what about the cousin?"

"Miss Merton? Oh no! There is clearly no sympathy between her and Diana. How could there be?"

"Yes—but my dear fellow!—that girl knows—must know—everything there is to know! And she dislikes Diana; she is jealous of her; that I saw quite plainly this afternoon. And, moreover, she is probably quite well informed about you and your intentions. She gossiped half through lunch with that ill-bred fellow Birch. I heard your name once or twice. Oh! — and by-the-way!"—Sir James turned sharply on his heel—"what was she confabulating about with Miss Drake all that time in the garden? Did they know each other before?"

Marsham replied in the negative. But he, too, was disagreeably arrested by the recollection of the two girls walking together, and of the intimacy and animation of their talk. And he could recall what Sir James had not seen—the strangeness of Alicia's manner, and the peremptoriness with which she had endeavored to carry him home with her. Had she—after hearing the story—tried to interrupt or postpone the crucial scene with Diana? That seemed to him the probable explanation, and the idea roused in him a hot and impotent anger. What business was it of hers?

"H'm!" said Sir James. "You may be sure that Miss Drake is now in the secret. She was very discreet on the way home. But she will take sides; and not, I think, with us. She seems to have a good deal of influence with your mother."

Marsham reluctantly admitted it.

"My sister, too, will be hostile. Don't let's forget that."

Sir James shrugged his shoulders, with the smile of one who is determined to keep his spirits up.

"Well, my dear Marsham, you have your battle cut out for you! Don't delay it. Where is Lady Lucy?"

"In town."

"Can't you devise some excuse that will take you back to her early to-morrow morning?"

Marsham thought over it. Easy enough, if only the engagement were announced! But both agreed that silence was imperative. Whatever chance there might be with Lady Lucy would be entirely destroyed were the matter made public before her son had consulted her.

"Everybody here is on the tiptoe of expectation," said Sir James. "But that you know; you must face it somehow. Invent a letter from Ferrier—some party *contretemps*—anything!—I'll help you through. And if you see your mother in the morning, I will turn up in the afternoon."

The two men paused. They were standing together—in conference; but each was conscious of a background of hurrying thoughts that had so far been hardly expressed at all.

Marsham suddenly broke out:

"Sir James!—I know you thought there were excuses—almost justification—for what that poor creature did. I was a boy of fifteen at the time you made your famous speech, and I only know it by report. You spoke, of course, as an advocate—but I have heard it said—that you expressed your own personal belief. Wherever the case is discussed, there are still—as you know—two opinions—one more merciful than the other. If the line you took was not merely professional; if you personally believed your own case; can you give me some of the arguments—you were probably unable to state them all in court—that convinced you? Let me have something wherewith to meet my mother. She won't look at this altogether from the worldly point of view.

She will have a standard of her own. Merely to belittle the thing, as long past and forgotten, won't help me. But if I *could* awaken her pity!—if you could give me the wherewithal—"

Sir James turned away. He walked to the window and stood there a minute, his face invisible. When he returned, his pallor betrayed what his steady and dignified composure would otherwise have concealed.

"I can tell you what Mrs. Sparling told me—in prison—with the accents of a dying woman—what I believed then—what I believe now.—Moreover, I have some comparatively recent confirmation of this belief.—But this is too public!"—he looked round the library—"we might be disturbed. Come to my room to-night. I shall go up early, on the plea of letters. I always carry with me—certain documents. For her child's sake, I will show them to you."

At the last words the voice of the speaker, rich in every tender and tragic note, no less than in those of irony or invective, wavered for the first time. He stooped abruptly, took up the book he had been reading, and left the room.

Marsham, too, went up-stairs. As he passed along the main corridor to his room, lost in perplexity and foreboding, he heard the sound of a woman's dress, and, looking up, saw Alicia Drake coming toward him.

She started at sight of him, and under the bright electric light of the passage he saw her redden.

"Well, Oliver!—you stayed a good while."

"Not so very long. I have been home nearly an hour. I hope the horses went well!"

"Excellently. Do you know where Sir James is?"

It seemed to him the question was significantly asked. He gave it a cold answer.

"Not at this moment. He was in the smoking-room a little while ago."

He passed her abruptly. Alicia Drake pursued her way to the hall. She was carrying some letters to the post-box near the front door. When she arrived there she dropped two of them in at once, and held the other a moment in her hand, looking at it. It was addressed to "Mrs. Fotheringham, Manningham House, Leeds."

Meanwhile, Diana herself was wrestling with her own fate.

When Marsham rode away from her, and she had watched his tall figure disappear into the dusk, she turned back toward the house, and saw it and the world round it with new eyes. The moon shone on the old front, mellowing it to a brownish ivory; the shadows of the trees lay clear on the whitened grass; and in the luminous air colors of sunrise and of moonrise blended, tints of pearl, of gold, and purple. A consecrating beauty lay on all visible things, and spoke to the girl's tender and passionate heart. In the shadow of the trees she stood a moment, her hands clasped on her breast, recalling Marsham's words of love and comfort, resting on him, reaching out through him to the Power behind the world, which spoke surely through this loveliness of the night, this joy in the soul!

And yet, her mood, her outlook—like Marsham's—was no longer what it had been on the hill-side. No ugly light of revelation had broken upon her, as upon him. But the conversation in the lime-walk had sobered the first young exaltation of love; it had somehow divided

them from the happy lovers of every day; it had also divided them—she hardly knew how or why—from that moment on the hill when Oliver had spoken of immediate announcement and immediate marriage. Nothing was to be said—except to Muriel—till Lady Lucy knew. She was glad. It made her bliss, in this intervening moment, more fully her own. She thought with yearning of Oliver's interview with his mother. A filial, though a trembling love sprang up in her. And the sense of having come to shelter and to haven seemed to give her strength for what she had never yet dared to face. The past was now to be probed, interrogated. She was firmly resolved to write to Riley & Bonner, to examine any papers there might be; not because she was afraid that anything might come between her and Oliver; rather because now, with his love to support her, she could bear whatever there might be to bear.

She stepped into the house. Some one was strumming in the drawing-room—with intervals between the strummings—as though the player stopped to listen for something or some one. Diana shrank into herself. She ran up-stairs noiselessly to her sitting-room, and opened the door as quietly as possible.

"Muriel!"

The voice was almost a whisper. Mrs. Colwood did not hear it. She was bending over the fire, with her back to the door, and a reading-lamp beside her. To her amazement, Diana heard a sob, a sound of stifled grief, which struck a sudden chill through her own excitement. She paused a moment, and repeated her friend's name. Mrs. Colwood started. She hastily rose, turning her face from Diana.

"Is that you? I thought you were still out."

Diana crossed the floor, and put her arm round the little gentle woman, whose breath was still shaken by the quiet sobs she was trying desperately to repress.

"Muriel, dear!—what is it?"

Mrs. Colwood found her voice, and her composure.

"Nothing! I was foolish—it doesn't matter."

Diana was sure she understood. She was suddenly ashamed to bring her own happiness into this desolate and widowed presence, and the kisses with which, mutely, she tried to comfort her friend, were almost a plea to be forgiven.

But Muriel drew herself away. She looked searchingly, with recovered self-command, into Diana's face.

"Has Mr. Marsham gone?"

"Yes," said Diana, looking at her.

Then the smile within broke out, flooding eyes and lips. Under the influence of it, Mrs. Colwood's small tear-stained face passed through a quick instinctive change. She, too, smiled as though she could not help it; then she bent forward and kissed Diana.

"Is it all right?"

The peculiar eagerness in the tone struck Diana. She returned the kiss, a little wistfully.

"Were you so anxious about me? Wasn't it—rather plain?"

Mrs. Colwood laughed.

"Sit down there, and tell me all about it."

She pushed Diana into a chair and sat down at her feet. Diana, with some difficulty, her hand over her eyes, told all that could be told of a moment the heart of which no true lover betrays. Muriel Colwood listened with her face against the girl's dress, sometimes pressing her lips to the hand beside her.

"Is he going to see Lady Lucy to-morrow?" she asked, when Diana paused.

"Yes. He goes up by the first train."

Both were silent awhile. Diana, in the midst of all the natural flutter of blood and pulse, was conscious of a strong yearning to tell her friend more—to say: "And he has brought me comfort and courage—as well as love! I shall dare now to look into the past—to take up my father's burden. If it hurts, Oliver will help me."

But she had been brought up in a school of reticence, and her loyalty to her father and mother sealed her lips. That anxiety, that burden, nobody must share with her but Oliver—and perhaps his mother; his mother, so soon to be hers.

Muriel Colwood, watching her face, could hardly restrain herself. But the moment for which her whole being was waiting in a tension scarcely to be borne had not yet come. She chastened and rebuked her own dread.

They talked a little of the future. Diana, in a blessed fatigue, threw herself back in her chair, and chattered softly, listening now and then for the sounds of the piano in the room below, and evidently relieved whenever, after a silence, fresh fragments from some comic opera of the day, much belied in the playing, penetrated to the upper floor. Meanwhile, neither of them spoke of Fanny Merton. Diana, with a laugh, repeated Marsham's proposal for a six weeks' engagement. That was absurd! But, after all, it could not be very long. She hoped Oliver would be content to keep Beechcote. They could, of course, always spend a good deal of time with Lady Lucy.

And in mentioning that name she showed not the

smallest misgiving, not a trace of uneasiness, while every time it was uttered it pricked the shrinking sense of her companion. Mrs. Colwood had not watched and listened during her Tallyn visit for nothing.

At last a clock struck down-stairs, and a door opened. Diana sprang up.

"Time to dress! And I've left Fanny alone all this while!"

She hurried toward the door; then turned back.

"Please!—I'm not going to tell Fanny just yet. Neither Fanny nor any one—till Lady Lucy knows. What happened after we went away? Was Fanny amused?"

"Very much, I should say."

"She made friends with Miss Drake?"

"They were inseparable, till Miss Drake departed."

Diana laughed.

"How odd! That I should never have prophesied. And Mr. Birch? I needn't have him to lunch again, need I?"

"Miss Merton invited him to tea—on Saturday."

Diana reddened.

"Must I—!" she said, impetuously; then stopped herself, and opened the door.

Outside, Fanny Merton was just mounting the stairs, a candle in her hand. She stopped in astonishment at the sight of Diana.

"Diana! where have you been all this time?"

"Only talking to Muriel. We heard you playing; so we thought you weren't dull," said Diana, rather penitently.

"I was only playing till you came in," was the sharp reply. "When did Mr. Marsham go?"

Diana by this time was crossing the landing to the door of her room, with Fanny behind her.

"Oh, quite an hour ago. Hadn't we better dress? Dinner will be ready directly."

Fanny took no notice. She entered her cousin's room, in Diana's wake.

"Well?" she said, interrogatively. She leaned her back against the wardrobe, and folded her arms.

Diana turned. She met Fanny's black eyes, sparkling with excitement.

"I'll give you my news at dinner," said Diana, flushing against her will. "And I want to know how you liked Miss Drake."

Fanny's eyes shot fire.

"That's all very fine! That means, of course, that you're not going to tell me anything!"

"Fanny!" cried Diana, helplessly. She was held spellbound by the passion, the menace in the girl's look. But the touch of shrinking in her attitude roused brutal violence in Fanny.

"Yes, it does!" she said, fiercely. "I understand!—don't I! I am not good enough for you, and you'll make me feel it. You're going to make a smart marriage, and you won't care whether you ever set eyes on any of us again. Oh! I know you've given us money—or you say you will. If I knew which side my bread was buttered, I suppose I should hold my tongue.—But when you treat me like the dirt under your feet—when you tell everything to that woman Mrs. Colwood, who's no relation, and nothing in the world to you—and leave me kicking my heels all alone, because I'm not the kind you want, and you wish to goodness I'd never come—when you show as plain as you can that I'm a common creat-

ure—not fit to pick up your gloves!—I tell you I just won't stand it. No one would — who knew what I know!"

The last words were flung in Diana's teeth with all the force that wounded pride and envious wrath could give them. Diana tottered a little. Her hand clung to the dressing-table behind her.

"What do you know?" she said. "Tell me at once—what you mean."

Fanny contemptuously shook her head. She walked to the door, and before Diana could stop her, she had rushed across to her own room and locked herself in.

There she walked up and down panting. She hardly understood her own rage, and she was quite conscious that, for her own interests, she had acted during the whole afternoon like a fool. First, stung by the pique excited in her by the talk of the luncheon-table, she had let herself be exploited and explored by Alicia Drake. She had not meant to tell her secret, but somehow she had told it, simply to give herself importance with this smart lady, and to feel her power over Diana. Then, it was no sooner told than she was quickly conscious that she had given away an advantage, which from a tactical point of view she had infinitely better have kept; and that the command of the situation might have passed from her to this girl whom Diana had supplanted. Furious with herself, she had tried to swear Miss Drake to silence, only to be politely but rather scornfully put aside.

Then the party had broken up. Mr. Birch had been offended by the absence of the hostess, and had vouchsafed but a careless good-bye to Miss Merton. The Roughsedges went off without asking her to visit them; and as for the Captain, he was an odious young man. Since

their departure, Mrs. Colwood had neglected her, and now Diana's secret return, her long talk with Mrs. Colwood, had filled the girl's cup of bitterness. She had secured that day a thousand pounds for her family and herself; and at the end of it, she merely felt that the day had been an abject and intolerable failure! Did the fact that she so felt it bear strange witness to the truth that at the bottom of her anger and her cruelty there was a masked and distorted something which was not wholly vile—which was, in fact, the nature's tribute to something nobler than itself? That Diana shivered at and repulsed her was the hot-iron that burned and seared. And that she richly deserved it—and knew it—made its smart not a whit the less.

Fanny did not appear at dinner. Mrs. Colwood and Diana dined alone—Diana very white and silent. After dinner, Diana began slowly to climb the shallow old staircase. Mrs. Colwood followed her.

"Where are you going?" she said, trying to hold her back.

Diana looked at her. In the girl's eyes there was a sudden and tragic indignation.

"Do you all know?" she said, under her breath—"all—all of you?" And again she began to mount, with a resolute step.

Mrs. Colwood dared not follow her any farther. Diana went quickly up and along the gallery; she knocked at Fanny's door. After a moment Mrs. Colwood heard it opened, and a parley of voices—Fanny's short and sullen, Diana's very low. Then the door closed, and Mrs. Colwood knew that the cousins were together.

How the next twenty minutes passed, Mrs. Colwood

could never remember. At the end of them she heard steps slowly coming down the stairs, and a cry—her own name—not in Diana's voice. She ran out into the hall.

At the top of the stairs, stood Fanny Merton, not daring to move farther. Her eyes were starting out of her head, her face flushed and distorted.

"You go to her!" She stooped, panting, over the balusters, addressing Mrs. Colwood. "She won't let me touch her."

Diana descended, groping. At the foot of the stairs she caught at Mrs. Colwood's hand, went swaying across the hall and into the drawing-room. There she closed the door, and looked into Mrs. Colwood's eyes. Muriel saw a face in which bloom and first youth were forever dead, though in its delicate features horror was still beautiful. She threw her arms round the girl, weeping. But Diana put her aside. She walked to a chair, and sat down. "My mother—" she said, looking up.

Her voice dropped. She moistened her dry lips, and began once more: "My mother—"

But the brain could maintain its flickering strength no longer. There was a low cry of "Oliver!" that stabbed the heart; then, suddenly, her limbs were loosened, and she sank back, unconscious, out of her friend's grasp and ken.

CHAPTER XI

HER ladyship will be here directly, sir."

Lady Lucy's immaculate butler opened the door of her drawing-room in Eaton Square, ushered in Sir James Chide, noiselessly crossed the room to see to the fire, and then as noiselessly withdrew.

"Impossible that any one should be as respectable as that man looks!" thought Sir James, impatiently. He walked forward to the fire, warmed hands and feet chilled by a nipping east wind, and then, with his back to the warmth, he examined the room.

It was very characteristic of its mistress. At Tallyn Henry Marsham had worked his will; here, in this house taken since his death, it was the will and taste of his widow which had prevailed. A gray paper with a small gold sprig upon it, sofas and chairs not too luxurious, a Brussels carpet, dark and unobtrusive, and chintz curtains; on the walls, drawings by David Cox, Copley Fielding, and De Wint; a few books with Mudie labels; costly photographs of friends and relations, especially of the relations' babies; on one table, and under a glass case, a model in pith of Lincoln Cathedral, made by Lady Lucy's uncle, who had been a Canon of Lincoln; on another, a set of fine carved chessmen; such was the furniture of the room. It expressed—and with emphasis—the tastes and likings of that section of English society in which, firmly based as it is upon an ample supply of all material

goods, a seemly and intelligent interest in things ideal and spiritual is also to be found. Everything in the room was in its place, and had been in its place for years. Sir James got no help from the contemplation of it.

The door opened, and Lady Lucy came quietly in. Sir James looked at her sharply as they shook hands. She had more color than usual; but the result was to make the face look older, and certain lines in it disagreeably prominent. Very likely she had been crying. He hoped she had.

"Oliver told you to expect me?"

She assented. Then, still standing, she looked at him steadily.

"This is a very terrible affair, Sir James."

"Yes. It must have been a great shock to you."

"Oh! that does not matter," she said, impatiently. "I must not think of myself. I must think of Oliver. Will you sit down?"

She motioned him, in her stately way, to a seat. He realized, as he faced her, that he beheld her in a new aspect. She was no longer the gracious and smiling hostess, as her familiar friends knew her, both at Tallyn and in London. Her manner threw a sudden light on certain features in her history: Marsham's continued dependence on his mother and inadequate allowance, the autocratic ability shown in the management of the Tallyn household and estates, management in which Marsham was allowed practically no share at all, and other traits and facts long known to him. The gentle, scrupulous, composed woman of every day had vanished in something far more vigorously drawn; he felt himself confronted by a personality as strong as, and probably more stubborn than his own.

Lady Lucy seated herself. She quietly arranged the folds of her black satin dress; she drew forward a stool, and rested her feet upon it. Sir James watched her, uncertain how to begin. But she saved him the decision.

"I have had a painful interview with my son" she said, quietly. "It could not be otherwise, and I can only hope that in a little while he will do me justice. Oliver will join us presently. And now—first, Sir James, let me ask you—you really believe that Miss Mallory has been till now in ignorance of her mother's history?"

Sir James started.

"Good Heavens, Lady Lucy! Can you — do you—suppose anything else?"

Lady Lucy paused before replying.

"I cannot suppose it—since both you and my son—and Mr. Ferrier—have so high an opinion of her. But it is a strange and mysterious thing that she should have remained in this complete ignorance all these years—and a cruel thing, of course—to everybody concerned."

Sir James nodded.

"I agree. It was a cruel thing, though it was done, no doubt, from the tenderest motives. The suffering was bound to be not less but more, sooner or later."

"Miss Mallory is very greatly to be pitied. But it is, of course, clear that my son proposed to her, not knowing what it was essential that he should know."

Sir James paused.

"We are old friends, Lady Lucy—you and I," he said at last, with deliberation; and as he spoke he bent forward and took her hand. "I am sure you will let me ask you a few questions."

Lady Lucy made no reply. Her hand—without any

movement of withdrawal or rebuff—gently dropped from his.

"You have been, I think, much attracted by Miss Mallory herself?"

"Very much attracted. Up to this morning I thought that she would make an excellent wife for Oliver. But I have been acting, of course, throughout under a false impression."

"Is it your feeling that to marry her would injure Oliver's career?"

"Certainly. But that is not what weighs with me most heavily."

"I did not for a moment believe that it would. However, let us take the career first. This is how I look at it. If the marriage went forward, there would no doubt be some scandal and excitement at first, when the truth was known. But Oliver's personality and the girl's charm would soon live it down. In this strange world I am not at all sure it might not in the end help their future. Oliver would be thought to have done a generous and romantic thing, and his wife's goodness and beauty would be all the more appreciated for the background of tragedy."

Lady Lucy moved impatiently.

"Sir James—I am a plain person, with plain ideas. The case would present itself to me very differently; and I believe that my view would be that of the ordinary man and woman. However, I repeat, that is not what I think of first—by any means."

"You think of the criminal taint?—the risk to Oliver —and to Oliver's children?"

She made a sign of assent.

"Character—and the protection of character—is not

that what we have to think of—above all—in this world of temptation? We can none of us afford to throw away the ordinary helps and safeguards. How can I possibly aid and abet Oliver's marriage with the daughter of a woman who first robbed her own young sister, in a peculiarly mean and cruel way, and then committed a deliberate and treacherous murder?"

"Wait a moment!" exclaimed Sir James, holding up his hand. "Those adjectives, believe me, are unjust."

"I know that you think so," was the animated reply. "But I remember the case; I have my own opinion."

"They are unjust," repeated Sir James, with emphasis. "Then it is really the horror of the thing itself—not so much its possible effect on social position and opinion, which decides you?"

"I ask myself—I must ask myself," said his companion, with equal emphasis, forcing the words: "can I help Oliver to marry the daughter—of a convicted murderess—and adulteress?"

"No!" said Sir James, holding up his hand again—"*No!*"

Lady Lucy fell back in her chair. Her unwonted color had disappeared, and the old hand lying in her lap—a hand thin to emaciation—shook a little.

"Is not this too painful for us both, Sir James?—can we continue it? I have my duty to think of; and yet—I cannot, naturally, speak to you with entire frankness. Nor can I possibly regard your view as an impartial one. Forgive me. I should not have dreamed of referring to the matter in any other circumstances."

"Certainly, I am not impartial," said Sir James, looking up. "You know that, of course, well enough."

He spoke in a strong full voice. Lady Lucy encoun-

tered a singular vivacity in the gray eyes, as though the whole power of the man's personality backed the words.

"Believe me," she said, with dignity, and not without kindness, "it is not I who would revive such memories."

Sir James nodded quietly.

"I am not impartial; but I am well informed. It was my view which affected the judge, and ultimately the Home Office. And since the trial—in quite recent years—I have received a strange confirmation of it which has never been made public. Did Oliver report this to you?"

"He told me certain facts," said Lady Lucy, unwillingly; "but I did not see that they made much difference."

"Perhaps he did not give them the right emphasis," said Sir James, calmly. "Will you allow *me* to tell you the whole story?—as it appears to me."

Lady Lucy looked distressed.

"Is it worth while," she said, earnestly, "to give yourself so much pain? I cannot imagine that it could alter the view I take of my duty."

Sir James flushed, and sternly straightened himself. It was a well-known gesture, and ominous to many a prisoner in the dock.

"Worth while!" he said. "Worth while!—when your son's future may depend on the judgment you form."

The sharpness of his tone called the red also to Lady Lucy's cheek.

"Can anything that may be said now alter the irrevocable?" she asked, in protest.

"It cannot bring the dead to life; but if you are really

more influenced in this matter by the heinousness of the crime itself, by the moral infection, so to speak—that may spring from any kinship with Juliet Sparling or inheritance from her—than by any dread of social disgrace or disadvantage—if that be true!—then for Oliver's sake—for that poor child's sake—you *ought* to listen to me! There, I can meet you—there, I have much to say."

He looked at her earnestly. The slight, involuntary changes of expression in Lady Lucy, as he was speaking, made him say to himself: "She is *not* indifferent to the social stigma—she deceives herself!" But he made no sign of his perception; he held her to her word.

She paused, in evident hesitation, saying at last, with some coldness:

"If you wish it, Sir James, of course I am quite ready to listen. I desire to do nothing harshly."

"I will not keep you long."

Bending forward, his hands on his knees, his eyes upon the ground, he thought a moment. When he began to speak, it was in a quiet and perfectly colorless tone.

"I knew Juliet Wentworth first—when she was seventeen. I was on the Midland Circuit, and went down to the Milchester Assizes. Her father was High Sheriff, and asked me, with other barristers of the Circuit, not only to his official dinner in the county town, but to luncheon at his house, a mile or two away. There I saw Miss Wentworth. She made a deep impression on me. After the Assizes were over, I stayed at her father's house and in the neighborhood. Within a month I proposed to her. She refused me. I merely mention these circumstances for the sake of reporting my first impressions of her character. She was very young, and of an extraordinarily nervous and sensitive organization. She used

to remind me of Horace's image of the young fawn trembling and starting in the mountain paths at the rustling of a leaf or the movement of a lizard. I felt then that her life might very well be a tragedy, and I passionately desired to be able to protect and help her. However, she would have nothing to do with me, and after a little while I lost sight of her. I did happen to hear that her father, having lost his first wife, had married again, that the girl was not happy at home, and had gone off on a long visit to some friends in the United States. Then for years I heard nothing. One evening, about ten years after my first meeting with her, I read in the evening papers the accounts of a 'Supposed Murder at Brighton.' Next morning Riley & Bonner retained me for the defence. Mr. Riley came to see me, with Mr. Sparling, the husband of the incriminated lady, and it was in the course of my consultation with them that I learned who Mrs. Sparling was. I had to consider whether to take up the case or not; I saw at once it would be a fight for her life, and I accepted it."

"What a terrible — terrible — position!" murmured Lady Lucy, who was shading her eyes with her hand.

Sir James took no notice. His trained mind and sense were now wholly concerned with the presentation of his story.

"The main facts, as I see them, were these. Juliet Wentworth had married—four years before this date—a scholar and archæologist whom she had met at Harvard during her American stay. Mr. Sparling was an Englishman, and a man of some means who was devoting himself to exploration in Asia Minor. The marriage was not really happy, though they were in love with each other. In both there was a temperament touched with melan-

choly, and a curious incapacity to accept the common facts of life. Both hated routine, and were always restless for new experience. Mrs. Sparling was brilliant in society. She was wonderfully handsome, in a small slight way; her face was not unlike Miss Curran's picture of Shelley—the same wildness and splendor in the eyes, the same delicacy of feature, the same slight excess of breadth across the cheek-bones, and curly mass of hair. She was odd, wayward, eccentric — yet always lovable and full of charm. He was a fine creature in many ways, but utterly unfit for practical life. His mind was always dreaming of buried treasure—the treasure of the archæologist: tombs, vases, gold ornaments, papyri; he had the passion of the excavator and explorer.

"They came back to England from America shortly after their marriage, and their child was born. The little girl was three years old when Sparling went off to dig in a remote part of Asia Minor. His wife resented his going; but there is no doubt that she was still deeply in love with him. She herself took a little house at Brighton for the child's sake. Her small startling beauty soon made her remarked, and her acquaintances rapidly increased. She was too independent and unconventional to ask many questions about the people that amused her; she took them as they came—"

"Sir James!—dear Sir James." Lady Lucy raised a pair of imploring hands. "What good can it do that you should tell me all this? It shows that this poor creature had a wild, undisciplined character. Could any one ever doubt it?"

"Wild? undisciplined?" repeated Sir James. "Well, if you think that you have disposed of the mystery of it by those adjectives! For me—looking back—she was

what life and temperament and heredity had made her. Up to this point it was an innocent wildness. She could lose herself in art or music; she did often the most romantic and generous things; she adored her child; and but for some strange kink in the tie that bound them, she would have adored her husband. Well!"—he shrugged his shoulders mournfully — "there it is: she was alone—she was beautiful—she had no doubt a sense of being neglected—she was thirsting for some deeper draught of life than had yet been hers—and by the hideous irony of fate she found it—in gambling!—and in the friendship which ruined her!"

Sir James paused. Rising from his chair, he began to pace the large room. The immaculate butler came in, made up the fire, and placed the tea: domestic and comfortable rites, in grim contrast with the story that held the minds of Lady Lucy and her guest. She sat motionless meanwhile; the butler withdrew, and the tea remained untouched.

"Sir Francis and Lady Wing — the two fiends who got possession of her—had been settled at Brighton for about a year. Their debts had obliged them to leave London, and they had not yet piled up a sufficient mountain of fresh ones to drive them out of Brighton. The man was the disreputable son of a rich and hard-working father who, in the usual way, had damned his son by removing all incentives to work, and turning him loose with a pile of money. He had married an adventuress—a girl with a music-hall history, some beauty, plenty of vicious ability, and no more conscience than a stone. They were the centre of a gambling and racing set; but Lady Wing was also a very fine musician, and it was through this talent of hers that she and Juliet Sparling

became acquainted. They met, first, at a charity concert! Mrs. Sparling had a fine voice, Lady Wing accompanied her. The Wings flattered her, and professed to adore her. Her absent whimsical character prevented her from understanding what kind of people they were; and in her great ignorance of the world, combined with her love of the romantic and the extreme, she took the persons who haunted their house for Bohemians, when she should have known them—the majority of them—for scoundrels. You will remember that baccarat was then the rage. The Wings played it incessantly, and were very skilful in the decoying and plunder of young men. Juliet Sparling was soon seized by the excitement of the game, and her beauty, her evident good breeding and good faith, were of considerable use to the Wings' *ménage*. Very soon she had lost all the money that her husband had left to her credit, and her bankers wrote to notify her that she was overdrawn. A sudden terror of Sparling's displeasure seized her; she sold a bracelet, and tried to win back what she had lost. The result was only fresh loss, and in a panic she played on and on, till one disastrous night she got up from the baccarat-table heavily in debt to one or two persons, including Sir Francis Wing. With the morning came a letter from her husband, remonstrating in a rather sharp tone on what her own letters—and probably an account from some other source—had told him of her life at Brighton; insisting on the need for economy, owing to his own heavy expenses in the great excavation he was engaged upon; and expressing the peremptory hope that she would make the money he had left her last for another two months—"

Sir James lingered in his walk. He stared out of

window at the square garden for a few moments, then turned to look frowning at his companion.

"Then came her temptation. Her father had died a year before, leaving her the trustee of her only sister, who was not yet of age. It had taken some little time to wind up his affairs; but on the day after she received her husband's letter of remonstrance, six thousand pounds out of her father's estate was paid into her banking account. By this time she was in one of those states of excitement and unreasoning terror to which she had been liable from her childhood. She took the trust money in order to pay the debts, and then gambled again in order to replace the trust money. Her motive throughout was the motive of the hunted creature. She was afraid of confessing to her husband, especially by letter. She believed he would cast her off—and in her despair and remorse she clung to his affection, and to the hope of his coming home, as she had never yet done.

"In less than a month—in spite of ups and downs of fortune, probably skilfully contrived by Francis Wing and his accomplices—for there can be no question that the play was fraudulent—she had lost four thousand out of the six; and it is clear that more than once she thought of suicide as the only way out, and nothing but the remembrance of the child restrained her. By this time Francis Wing, who was a most handsome, well-bred, and plausible villain, was desperately in love with her—if one can use the word love for such a passion. He began to lend her money in small sums. She was induced to look upon him as her only friend, and forced by the mere terror of the situation in which she found herself to propitiate and play him as best she might. One day, in an unguarded moment of remorse, she let

him guess what had happened about the trust money. Thenceforward she was wholly in his power. He pressed his attentions upon her; and she, alternately civil and repellent, as her mood went, was regarded by some of the guests in the house as not unlikely to respond to them in the end. Meanwhile he had told his wife the secret of the trust money for his own purposes. Lady Wing, who was an extremely jealous woman, believed at this time that he was merely pretending a passion for Mrs. Sparling in order the more securely to plunder what still remained of the six thousand pounds. She therefore aided and abetted him; and *her* plan, no doubt, was to wait till they and their accomplices had absorbed the last of Mrs. Sparling's money, and then to make a midnight flitting, leaving their victim to her fate.

"The *dénouement*, however, came with frightful rapidity. The Wings had taken an old house at the back of the downs for the summer, no doubt to escape from some of the notoriety they had gained in Brighton. There—to her final ruin—Juliet Sparling was induced to join them, and gambling began again; she still desperately hoping to replace the trust money, and salving her conscience, as to her sister, by drawing for the time on the sums lent her by Francis Wing.—Here at last Lady Wing's suspicion was aroused, and Mrs. Sparling found herself between the hatred of the wife and the dishonorable passion of the husband. Yet to leave them would be the signal for exposure. For some time the presence of other guests protected her. Then the guests left, and one August night after dinner, Francis Wing, who had drunk a great deal of champagne, made frantic love to her. She escaped from him with difficulty, in a passion of loathing and terror, and rushed in-doors, where she found Lady

Wing in the gallery of the old house, on the first floor, walking up and down in a jealous fury. Juliet Sparling burst in upon her with the reproaches of a woman driven to bay, threatening to go at once to her husband and make a clean breast of the whole history of their miserable acquaintance. She was practically beside herself—already, as the sequel showed, mortally ill, worn out by remorse and sleeplessness, and quivering under the insult which had been offered her. Lady Wing recovered her own self-possession under the stimulus of Juliet's breakdown. She taunted her in the cruelest way, accused her of being the temptress in the case of Sir Francis, and of simulating a hypocritical indignation in order to save herself with her husband, and finally charged her with the robbery of her sister's money, declaring that as soon as daylight came she would take steps to set the criminal law in motion, and so protect both herself and her husband from any charge such a woman might bring against them. The threat, of course, was mere bluff. But Mrs. Sparling, in her frenzy and her ignorance, took it for truth. Finally, the fierce creature came up to her, snatching at a brooch in the bosom of her dress, and crying out in the vilest language that it was Sir Francis's gift. Juliet, pushed up against the panelling of the gallery, caught at a dagger belonging to a trophy of Eastern arms displayed on the wall, close to her hand, and struck wildly at her tormentor. The dagger pierced Lady Wing's left breast—she was in evening dress and *décolletée;* it penetrated to the heart, and she fell dead at Juliet's feet as her husband entered the gallery. Juliet dropped the dagger; and as Sir Francis rushed to his wife, she fled shrieking up the stairs—her white dress covered with blood—to her own room, falling uncon-

scious before she reached it. She was carried to her room by the servants—the police were sent for—and the rest—or most of the rest—you know."

Sir James ceased speaking. A heavy silence possessed the room.

Sir James walked quickly up to his companion.

"Now I ask you to notice two points in the story as I have told it. My cross-examination of Wing served its purpose as an exposure of the man—except in one direction. He swore that Mrs. Sparling had made dishonorable advances to him, and had finally become his mistress, in order to buy his silence on the trust money and the continuance of his financial help. On the other hand, the case for the defence was that—as I have stated—it was in the maddened state of feeling, provoked by his attack upon her honor, and made intolerable by the wife's taunts and threats, that Juliet Sparling struck the fatal blow. At the trial the judge believed me; the jury — and a large part of the public — you, I have no doubt among them — believed Wing. The jury were probably influenced by some of the evidence given by the fellow-guests in the house, which seemed to me simply to amount to this—that a woman in the strait in which Juliet Sparling was will endeavor, out of mortal fear, to keep the ruffian who has her in his power in a good-humor."

"However, I have now confirmatory evidence for my theory of the matter — evidence which has never been produced—and which I tell you now simply because the happiness of her child—and of your son—is at stake."

Lady Lucy moved a little. The color returned to her cheeks. Sir James, however, gave her no time to in-

terrupt. He stood before her, smiting one hand against another, to emphasize his words, as he continued:

"Francis Wing lived for some eighteen years after Mrs. Sparling's death. Then, just as the police were at last on his track as the avengers of a long series of frauds, he died at Antwerp in extreme poverty and degradation. The day before he died he dictated a letter to me, which reached me, through a priest, twenty-four hours after his death. For his son's sake, he invited me to regard it as confidential. If Mrs. Sparling had been alive I should, of course, have taken no notice of the request. But she had been dead for eighteen years; I had lost sight completely of Sparling and the child, and, curiously enough, I knew something of Wing's son. He was about ten years old at the death of his mother, and was then rescued from his father by the Wing kindred and decently brought up. At the time the letter reached me he was a promising young man of eight-and-twenty, he had just been called to the Bar, and he was in the chambers of a friend of mine. By publishing Wing's confession I could do no good to the dead, and I might harm the living. So I held my tongue. Whether, now, I should still hold it is, no doubt, a question.

"However, to go back to the statement. Wing declared to me in this letter that Juliet Sparling's relation to him had been absolutely innocent, that he had persecuted her with his suit, and she had never given him a friendly word, except out of fear. On the fatal evening he had driven her out of her mind, he said, by his behavior in the garden; she was not answerable for her actions; and his evidence at the trial was merely dictated either by the desire to make his own case look less black

or by the fiendish wish to punish Juliet Sparling for her loathing of him.

"But he confessed something else!—more important still. I must go back a little. You will remember my version of the dagger incident? I represented Mrs. Sparling as finding the dagger on the wall as she was pushed or dragged up against the panelling by her antagonist—as it were, under her hand. Wing swore at the trial that the dagger was not there, and had never been there. The house belonged to an old traveller and sportsman who had brought home arms of different sorts from all parts of the world. The house was full of them. There were two collections of them on the wall of the dining-room, one in the hall, and one or two in the gallery. Wing declared that the dagger used was taken by Juliet Sparling from the hall trophy, and must have been carried up-stairs with a deliberate purpose of murder. According to him, their quarrel in the garden had been a quarrel about money matters, and Mrs. Sparling had left him, in great excitement, convinced that the chief obstacle in the way of her complete control of Wing and his money lay in the wife. There again—as to the weapon—I had no means of refuting him. As far as the appearance—after the murder—of the racks holding the arms was concerned, the weapon might have been taken from either place. And again—on the whole—the jury believed Wing. The robbery of the sister's money—the incredible rapidity of Juliet Sparling's deterioration—had set them against her. Her wild beauty, her proud and dumb misery in the dock, were of a kind rather to alienate the plain man than to move him. They believed her capable of anything—and it was natural enough.

"But Wing confessed to me that he knew perfectly well that the dagger belonged to the stand in the gallery. He had often examined the arms there, and was quite certain of the fact. He swore this to the priest. Here, again, you can only explain his evidence by a desire for revenge."

Sir James paused. As he moved a little away from his companion his expression altered. It was as though he put from him the external incidents and considerations with which he had been dealing, and the vivacity of manner which fitted them. Feelings and forces of another kind emerged, clothing themselves in the beauty of an incomparable voice, and in an aspect of humane and melancholy dignity.

He turned to Lady Lucy.

"Now then," he said, gently, "I am in a position to put the matter to you finally, as—before God—it appears to me. Juliet Sparling—as I said to Oliver last night—was not a bad woman! She sinned deeply. but she was never false to her husband in thought or deed; none of her wrong-doing was deliberate; she was tortured by remorse; and her murderous act was the impulse of a moment, and partly in self-defence. It was wholly unpremeditated; and it killed her no less than her victim. When, next day, she was removed by the police, she was already a dying woman. I have in my possession a letter —written to me by her—after her release, in view of her impending death, by the order of the Home Office—a few days before she died. It is humble—it is heart-rending—it breathes the sincerity of one who had turned all her thoughts from earth; but it thanked me for having read her aright; and if ever I could have felt a doubt of my own interpretation of the case—but, thank God,

I never did!—that letter would have shamed it out of me! Poor soul, poor soul! She sinned, and she suffered—agonies, beyond any penalty of man's inflicting. Will you prolong her punishment in her child?"

Lady Lucy had covered her face with her hand. He saw her breath flutter in her breast. And sitting down beside her, blanched by the effort he had made, and by the emotion he had at last permitted himself, yet fixing his eyes steadily on the woman before him, he waited for her reply.

CHAPTER XII

LADY LUCY did not reply at once. She slowly drew forward the neglected tea-table, made tea, and offered it to Sir James. He took it impatiently, the Irish blood in him running hot and fast; and when she had finished her cup, and still the silence lasted, except for the trivial question-and-answer of the tea-making, he broke in upon it with a somewhat peremptory—

"Well?"

Lady Lucy clasped her hands on her lap. The hand which had been so far bare was now gloved like the other, and something in the spectacle of the long fingers, calmly interlocked and clad in spotless white kid, increased the secret exasperation in her companion.

"Believe me, dear Sir James," she said at last, lifting her clear brown eyes, "I am very grateful to you. It must have been a great effort for you to tell me this awful story, and I thank you for the confidence you have reposed in me."

Sir James pushed his chair back.

"I did it, of course, for a special reason," he said, sharply. "I hope I have given you cause to change your mind."

She shook her head slowly.

"What have you proved to me? That Mrs. Sparling's crime was not so hideous as some of us supposed?—that she did not fall to the lowest depths of all?—and

that she endured great provocation? But could anything really be more vile than the history of those weeks of excitement and fraud?—of base yielding to temptation?—of cruelty to her husband and child?—even as you have told it? Her conduct led directly to adultery and violence. If, by God's mercy, she was saved from the worst crimes imputed to her, does it make much difference to the moral judgment we must form?"

He looked at her in amazement.

"No difference!—between murder and a kind of accident?—between adultery and fidelity?"

Lady Lucy hesitated—then resumed, with stubbornness: "You put it—like an advocate. But look at the indelible facts—look at the future. If my son married the daughter of such a woman and had children, what must happen? First of all, could he, could any one, be free from the dread of inherited lawlessness and passion? A woman does not gamble, steal, and take life in a moment of violence without some exceptional flaw in temperament and will, and we see again and again how such flaws reappear in the descendants of weak and wicked people. Then again—Oliver must renounce and throw away all that is implied in family memories and traditions. His wife could never speak to her children and his of her own mother and bringing up. They would be kept in ignorance, as she herself was kept, till the time came that they must know. Say what you will, Juliet Sparling was condemned to death for murder in a notorious case—after a trial which also branded her as a thief. Think of a boy at Eton or Oxford—a girl in her first youth—hearing for the first time—perhaps in some casual way—the story of the woman whose blood ran in theirs!—What a cloud on

a family!—what a danger and drawback for young lives!"

Her delicate features, under the crown of white hair, were once more flooded with color, and the passion in her eyes held them steady under Sir James's penetrating look. Through his inner mind there ran the cry: "Pharisee!—Hypocrite!"

But he fought on.

"Lady Lucy!—your son loves this girl—remember that! And in herself you admit that she is blameless—all that you could desire for his wife—remember that also."

"I remember both. But I was brought up by people who never admitted that any feeling was beyond our control or ought to be indulged—against right and reason."

"Supposing Oliver entirely declines to take your view?—supposing he marries Miss Mallory?"

"He will not break my heart," she said, drawing a quicker breath. "He will get over it."

"But if he persists?"

"He must take the consequences. I cannot aid and abet him."

"And the girl herself? She has accepted him. She is young, innocent, full of tender and sensitive feeling. Is it possible that you should not weigh her claim against your fears and scruples?"

"I feel for her most sincerely."

Sir James suddenly threw out a restless foot, which caught Lady Lucy's fox terrier, who was snoozing under the tea-table. He hastily apologized, and the speaker resumed:

"But, in my opinion, she would do a far nobler thing

if she regarded herself as bound to some extent to bear her mother's burden—to pay her mother's debt to society. It may sound harsh — but is it? Is a dedicated life necessarily an unhappy life? Would not everybody respect and revere her? She would sacrifice herself, as the Sister of Mercy does, or the missionary, and she would find her reward. But to enter a family with an unstained record, bearing with her such a name and such associations, would be, in my opinion, a wrong and selfish act!"

Lady Lucy drew herself to her full height. In the dusk of the declining afternoon the black satin and white ruffles of her dress, her white head in its lace cap, her thin neck and shoulders, her tall slenderness, and the rigidity of her attitude, made a formidable study in personality. Sir James's whole soul rose in one scornful and indignant protest. But he felt himself beaten. The only hope lay in Oliver himself.

He rose slowly from his chair.

"It is useless, I see, to try and argue the matter further. But I warn you: I do not believe that Oliver will obey you, and — forgive me Lady Lucy! — but—frankly—I hope he will not. Nor will he suffer too severely, even if you, his mother, desert him. Miss Mallory has some fortune—"

"Oliver will not live upon his wife!"

"He may accept her aid till he has found some way of earning money. What amazes me—if you will allow me the liberty of an old friend—is that you should think a woman justified in coercing a son of mature age in such a matter!"

His tone, his manner pierced Lady Lucy's pride. She threw back her head nervously, but her tone was calm:

"A woman to whom property has been intrusted must do her best to see that the will and desires of those who placed it in her hands are carried out!"

"Well, well!"—Sir James looked for his stick—"I am sorry for Oliver—but"—he straightened himself—"it will make a bigger man of him."

Lady Lucy made no reply, but her expression was eloquent of a patience which her old friend might abuse if he would.

"Does Ferrier know? Have you consulted him?" asked Sir James, turning abruptly.

"He will be here, I think, this afternoon—as usual," said Lady Lucy, evasively. "And, of course, he must know what concerns us so deeply."

As she spoke the hall-door bell was heard.

"That is probably he." She looked at her companion uncertainly. "Don't go, Sir James—unless you are really in a hurry."

The invitation was not urgent; but Sir James stayed, all the same. Ferrier was a man so interesting to his friends that no judgment of his could be indifferent to them. Moreover, there was a certain angry curiosity as to how far Lady Lucy's influence would affect him. Chide took inward note of the fact that his speculation took this form, and not another. Oh! the hypocritical obstinacy of decent women!—the lack in them of heart, of generosity, of imagination!

The door opened, and Ferrier entered, with Marsham and the butler behind him. Mr. Ferrier, in his London frock-coat, appeared rounder and heavier than ever but for the contradictory vigor and lightness of his step, the shrewd cheerfulness of the eyes. It had been a hard week in Parliament, however, and his features

and complexion showed signs of overwork and short sleep.

For a few minutes, while tea was renewed, and the curtains closed, he maintained a pleasant chat with Lady Lucy, while the other two looked at each other in silence.

But when the servant had gone, Ferrier put down his cup unfinished. "I am very sorry for you both," he said, gravely, looking from Lady Lucy to her son. "I need not say your letter this morning took me wholly by surprise. I have since been doing my best to think of a way out."

There was a short pause—broken by Marsham, who was sitting a little apart from the others, restlessly fingering a paper-knife.

"If you could persuade my mother to take a kind and reasonable view," he said, abruptly; "that is really the only way out."

Lady Lucy stiffened under the attack. Drawn on by Ferrier's interrogative glance, she quietly repeated, with more detail, and even greater austerity, the arguments and considerations she had made use of in her wrestle with Sir James. Chide clearly perceived that her opposition was hardening with every successive explanation of it. What had been at first, no doubt, an instinctive recoil was now being converted into a plausible and reasoned case, and the oftener she repeated it the stronger would she become on her own side and the more in love with her own contentions.

Ferrier listened attentively; took note of what she reported as to Sir James's fresh evidence; and when she ceased called upon Chide to explain. Chide's second defence of Juliet Sparling as given to a fellow-lawyer was a remarkable piece of technical statement, admira-

bly arranged, and unmarked by any trace of the personal feeling he had not been able to hide from Lady Lucy.

"Most interesting—most interesting," murmured Ferrier, as the story came to an end. "A tragic and memorable case."

He pondered a little, his eyes on the carpet, while the others waited. Then he turned to Lady Lucy and took her hand.

"Dear lady!" he said, gently, "I think—you ought to give way!"

Lady Lucy's face quivered a little. She decidedly withdrew her hand.

"I am sorry you are both against me," she said, looking from one to the other. "I am sorry you help Oliver to think unkindly of me. But if I must stand alone, I must. I cannot give way."

Ferrier raised his eyebrows with a little perplexed look. Thrusting his hands into his pockets, he went to stand by the fire, staring down into it a minute or two, as though the flames might bring counsel.

"Miss Mallory is still ignorant, Oliver—is that so?" he said, at last.

"Entirely. But it is not possible she should continue to be so. She has begun to make inquiries, and I agree with Sir James it is right she should be told—"

"I propose to go down to Beechcote to-morrow," put in Sir James.

"Have you any idea what view Miss Mallory would be likely to take of the matter—as affecting her engagement?"

"She could have no view that was not unselfish and noble—like herself," said Marsham, hotly. "What has that to do with it?"

"'DEAR LADY,' HE SAID, GENTLY, 'I THINK YOU OUGHT TO GIVE WAY!'"

"She might release you," was Ferrier's slow reply.

Marsham flushed.

"And you think I should be such a hound as to let her!"

Sir James only just prevented himself from throwing a triumphant look at his hostess.

"You will, of course, inform her of your mother's opposition?" said Ferrier.

"It will be impossible to keep it from her."

"Poor child!" murmured Ferrier—"poor child!"

Then he looked at Lady Lucy.

"May I take Oliver into the inner room a little while?" he asked, pointing to a farther drawing-room.

"By all means. I shall be here when you return."

Sir James had a few hurried words in private with Marsham, and then took his leave. As he and Lady Lucy shook hands, he gave her a penetrating look.

"Try and think of the girl!" he said, in a low voice; "*the girl*—in her first youth."

"I think of my son," was the unmoved reply. "Good-bye, Sir James. I feel that we are adversaries, and I wish it were not so."

Sir James walked away, possessed by a savage desire to do some damage to the cathedral in pith, as he passed it on his way to the door; or to shake his fist in the faces of Wilberforce and Lord Shaftesbury, whose portraits adorned the staircase. The type of Catholic woman which he most admired rose in his mind; compassionate, tender, infinitely soft and loving—like the saints; save where "the faith" was concerned—like the saints, again. This Protestant rigidity and self-sufficiency were the deuce!

But he would go down to Beechcote, and he and Oliver between them would see that child through.

Meanwhile, Ferrier and Marsham were in anxious conclave. Ferrier counselled delay. "Let the thing sleep a little. Don't announce the engagement. You and Miss Mallory will, of course, understand each other. You will correspond. But don't hurry it. So much consideration, at least, is due to your mother's strong feeling."

Marsham assented, but despondently.

"You know my mother; time will make no difference."

"I'm not so sure—I'm not so sure," said Ferrier, cheerfully. "Did your mother say anything about—finances?"

Marsham gave a gloomy smile.

"I shall be a pauper, of course—that was made quite plain to me."

"No, no!—that must be prevented!" said Ferrier, with energy.

Marsham was not quick to reply. His manner as he stood with his back to the fire, his distinguished head well thrown back on his straight, lean shoulders, was the manner of a proud man suffering humiliation. He was thirty-six, and rapidly becoming a politician of importance. Yet here he was—poor and impotent, in the midst of great wealth, wholly dependent, by his father's monstrous will, on his mother's caprice—liable to be thwarted and commanded, as though he were a boy of fifteen. Up till now Lady Lucy's yoke had been tolerable; to-day it galled beyond endurance.

Moreover, there was something peculiarly irritating at the moment in Ferrier's intervention. There had been

increased Parliamentary friction of late between the two men, in spite of the intimacy of their personal relations. To be forced to owe fortune, career, and the permission to marry as he pleased to Ferrier's influence with his mother was, at this juncture, a bitter pill for Oliver Marsham.

Ferrier understood him perfectly, and he had never displayed more kindness or more tact than in the conversation which passed between them. Marsham finally agreed that Diana must be frankly informed of his mother's state of mind, and that a waiting policy offered the only hope. On this they were retiring to the front drawing-room when Lady Lucy opened the communicating door.

"A letter for you, Oliver."

He took it, and turned it over. The handwriting was unknown to him.

"Who brought this?" he asked of the butler standing behind his mother.

"A servant, sir, from Beechcote Manor. He was told to wait for an answer."

"I will send one. Come when I ring."

The butler departed, and Marsham went hurriedly into the inner room, closing the door behind him. Ferrier and Lady Lucy were left, looking at each other in anxiety. But before they could put it into words, Marsham reappeared, in evident agitation. He hurried to the bell and rang it.

Lady Lucy pointedly made no inquiry. But Ferrier spoke.

"No bad news, I hope?"

Marsham turned.

"She has been told," he said, hoarsely. "Mrs. Col-

wood, her companion, speaks of 'shock.' I must go down at once."

Lady Lucy said nothing. She, too, had grown white.

The butler appeared. Marsham asked for the Sunday trains, ordered some packing, went down-stairs to speak to the Beechcote messenger, and returned.

Ferrier retired into the farthest window, and Marsham approached his mother.

"Good-bye, mother. I will write to you from Beechcote, where I shall stay at the little inn in the village. Have you no kind word that I may carry with me?"

Lady Lucy looked at him steadily.

"I shall write myself to Miss Mallory, Oliver."

His pallor gave place to a flush of indignation.

"Is it necessary to do anything so cruel, mother?"

"I shall not write cruelly."

He shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"Considering what you have made up your mind to do, I should have thought least said, soonest mended. However, if you must, you must. I can only prepare Diana for your letter and soften it when it comes."

"In your new love, Oliver, have you quite forgotten the old?" Lady Lucy's voice shook for the first time.

"I shall be only too glad to remember it, when you give me the opportunity," he said, sombrely.

"I have not been a bad mother to you, Oliver. I have claims upon you."

He did not reply, and his silence wounded Lady Lucy to the quick. Was it her fault if her husband, out of an eccentric distrust of the character of his son, and moved by a kind of old-fashioned and Spartan belief that a man must endure hardness before he is fit for luxury, had made her and not Oliver the arbiter and legatee of his

wealth? But Oliver had never wanted for anything. He had only to ask. What right had she to thwart her husband's decision?

"Good-bye, mother," said Marsham again. "If you are writing to Isabel you will, I suppose, discuss the matter with her. She is not unlikely to side with you—not for your reason, however—but because of some silly nonsense about politics. If she does, I beg she will not write to me. It could only embitter matters."

"I will give her your message. Good-bye, Oliver."

He left the room, with a gesture of farewell to Ferrier.

Ferrier came back toward the fire. As he did so he was struck—painfully struck—by a change in Lady Lucy. She was not pale, and her eyes were singularly bright. Yet age was, for the first time, written in a face from which Time had so far taken but his lightest toll. It moved him strangely; though, as to the matter in hand, his sympathies were all with Oliver. But through thirty years Lady Lucy had been the only woman for him. Since first, as a youth of twenty, he had seen her in her father's house, he had never wavered. She was his senior by five years, and their first acquaintance had been one of boy-adoration on his side and a charming elder-sisterliness on hers. Then he had declared himself, and she had refused him in order to marry Henry Marsham and Henry Marsham's fortune. It seemed to him then that he would soon forget her—soon find a warmer and more generous heart. But that was mere ignorance of himself. After awhile he became the intimate friend of her husband, herself, and her child. Something, indeed, had happened to his affection for her. He felt himself in no danger beside her, so far as passion was

concerned; and he knew very well that she would have banished him forever at a moment's notice rather than give her husband an hour's uneasiness. But to be near her, to be in her world, consulted, trusted, and flattered by her, to slip daily into his accustomed chair, to feel year by year the strands of friendship and of intimacy woven more closely between him and her—between him and hers—these things gradually filled all the space in his life left by politics or by thought. They deprived him of any other home, and this home became a necessity.

Then Henry Marsham died. Once more Ferrier asked Lady Lucy to marry him, and again she refused. He acquiesced; their old friendship was resumed; but, once more, with a difference. In a sense he had no longer any illusions about her. He saw that while she believed herself to be acting under the influence of religion and other high matters, she was, in truth, a narrow and rather cold-hearted woman, with a strong element of worldliness, disguised in much placid moralizing. At the bottom of his soul he resented her treatment of him, and despised himself for submitting to it. But the old habit had become a tyranny not to be broken. Where else could he go for talk, for intimacy, for rest? And for all his disillusion there were still at her command occasional felicities of manner and strains of feeling—ethereally delicate and spiritual, like a stanza from the *Christian Year*—that moved him and pleased his taste as nothing else had power to move and please; steeped, as they were, in a far-off magic of youth and memory.

So he stayed by her, and she knew very well that he would stay by her to the end.

He sat down beside her and took her hand.

"You are tired."

"It has been a miserable day."

"Shall I read to you? It would be wise, I think, to put it out of your mind for a while, and come back to it fresh."

"It will be difficult to attend." Her smile was faint and sad. "But I will do my best."

He took up a volume of Dean Church's sermons, and began to read. Presently, as always, his subtler self became conscious of the irony of the situation. He was endeavoring to soothe her trouble by applying to it some of the noblest religious thought of our day, expressed in the noblest language. Such an attempt implied some moral correspondence between the message and the listener. Yet all the time he was conscious himself of cowardice and hypocrisy. What part of the Christian message really applied to Lady Lucy this afternoon but the searching words: "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"

Yet he read on. The delicate ascetic face of his companion grew calmer; he himself felt a certain refreshment and rest. There was no one else in the world with whom he could sit like this, to whom he could speak or read of the inner life. Lucy Marsham had made him what he was, a childless bachelor, with certain memories in his past life of which he was ashamed—representing the revenge of a strong man's temperament and physical nature. But in the old age she had all but reached, and he was approaching, she was still the one dear and indispensable friend. If she must needs be harsh and tyrannical—well, he must try and mitigate the effects, for herself and others. But his utmost effort must restrain itself within certain limits. He was not at all sure that if

offended in some mortal point, she might not do without him. But so long as they both lived, he could not do without her.

Early the following morning Alicia Drake appeared in Eaton Square, and by two o'clock Mrs. Fotheringham was also there. She had rushed up from Leeds by the first possible train, summoned by Alicia's letter. Lady Lucy and her daughter held conference, and Miss Drake was admitted to their counsels.

"Of course, mamma," said Isabel Fotheringham, "I don't at all agree with you in the matter. Nobody is responsible for their mothers and fathers. We make ourselves. But I shall not be sorry if the discovery frees Oliver from a marriage which would have been a rope round his neck. She is a foolish, arrogant, sentimental girl, brought up on the most wrong-headed principles, and she could *never* have made a decent wife for him. She will, I hope, have the sense to see it—and he will be well out of it."

"Oliver, at present, is very determined," said Lady Lucy, in a tone of depression.

"Oh, well, of course, having just proposed to her, he must, of course, behave like a gentleman—and not like a cad. But she can't possibly hold him to it. You will write to her, mamma—and so shall I."

"We shall make him, I fear, very angry."

"Oliver? Well, there are moments in every family when it is no use shirking. We have to think of Oliver's career, and what he may do for his party, and for reform. You think he proposed to her in that walk on the hill?" said Mrs. Fotheringham, turning to her cousin Alicia.

Alicia woke up from a brown-study of her own. She was dressed with her usual perfection in a gray cloth, just suggesting the change of season. Her felt hat with its plume of feathers lay on her lap, and her hair, slightly loosened by the journey, captured the eye by its abundance and beauty. The violets on her breast perfumed the room, and the rings upon her hands flashed just as much as is permitted to an unmarried girl, and no more. As Mrs. Fotheringham looked at her, she said to herself: "Another Redfern! Really Alicia is too extravagant!"

On that head no one could have reproached herself. A cheap coat and skirt, much worn, a hat of no particular color or shape, frayed gloves and disreputable boots, proclaimed both the parsimony of her father's will and the independence of her opinions.

"Oh, of course he proposed on the hill," replied Alicia, thoughtfully. "And you say, Aunt Lucy, that *he* guessed—and she knew nothing? Yes! — I was certain he guessed."

"But she knows now," said Lady Lucy; "and, of course, we must all be very sorry for her."

"Oh, of course!" said Isabel. "But she will soon get over it. You won't find it will do her any harm. People will make her a heroine."

"I should advise her not to go about with that cousin," said Alicia, softly.

"The girl who told you?"

"She was an outsider! She told me, evidently, to spite her cousin, who seemed not to have paid her enough attention, and then wanted me to swear secrecy."

"Well, if her mother was a sister of Juliet Sparling, you can't expect much, can you? What a mercy it has all come out so soon! The mess would have been in-

finitely greater if the engagement had gone on a few weeks."

"My dear," said her mother, gravely, "we must not reckon upon Oliver's yielding to our persuasions."

Isabel smiled and shrugged her shoulders. Oliver condemn himself to the simple life!—to the forfeiture of half a million of money—for the sake of the *beaux yeux* of Diana Mallory! Oliver, who had never faced any hardship or gone without any luxury in his life!

Alicia said nothing; but the alertness of her brilliant eyes showed the activity of the brain behind them. While Mrs. Fotheringham went off to committees, Miss Drake spent the rest of the day in ministering to Lady Lucy, who found her company, her gossip about Beechcote, her sympathetic yet restrained attitude toward the whole matter, quite invaluable. But, in spite of these aids, the hours of waiting and suspense passed heavily, and Alicia said to herself that Cousin Lucy was beginning to look frail.

CHAPTER XIII

OWING to the scantiness of Sunday trains, Marsham did not arrive at Beechcote-village till between nine and ten at night. He left his bag at the village inn, tried to ignore the scarcely concealed astonishment with which the well-known master—or reputed master—of Tallyn was received within its extremely modest walls, and walked up to the manor-house. There he had a short conversation with Mrs. Colwood, who did not propose to tell Diana of his arrival till the morning.

"She does not know that I wrote to you," said the little lady, in her pale distress. "She wrote to you herself this evening. I hope I have not done wrong."

Marsham reassured her, and they had a melancholy consultation. Diana, it seemed, had insisted on getting up that day as usual. She had tottered across to her sitting-room and had spent the day there alone, writing a few letters, or sitting motionless in her chair for hours together. She had scarcely eaten, and Mrs. Colwood was sure she had not slept at all since the shock. It was to be hoped that out of sheer fatigue she might sleep, on this, the second night. But it was essential there should be no fresh excitement, such as the knowledge of Marsham's arrival would certainly arouse.

Mrs. Colwood could hardly bring herself to speak of Fanny Merton. She was, of course, still in the house—sulking—and inclined to blame everybody, her dead uncle

in particular, rather than herself. But, mercifully, she was departing early on the Monday morning—to some friends in London.

"If you come after breakfast you will find Miss Mallory alone. I will tell her first thing that you are here."

Marsham assented, and got up to take his leave. Involuntarily he looked round the drawing-room where he had first seen Diana the day before. Then it was flooded by spring sunshine—not more radiant than her face. Now a solitary lamp made a faint spot of light amid the shadows of the panelled walls. He and Mrs. Colwood spoke almost in whispers. The old house, generally so winning and sympathetic, seemed to hold itself silent and aloof—as though in this touch of calamity the living were no longer its master and the dead generations woke. And, up-stairs, Diana lay perhaps in her white bed, miserable and alone, not knowing that he was there, within a few yards of her.

Mrs. Colwood noiselessly opened a garden door and so dismissed him. It was moonlight outside, and instead of returning to the inn he took the road up the hill to the crest of the encircling down. Diverging a little to the left, he found himself on the open hill-side, at a point commanding the village and Beechcote itself, ringed by its ancient woods. In the village two dim lights, far apart, were visible; lights, he thought, of sickness or of birth?—for the poor sleep early. One of the Beechcote windows shone with a dim illumination. Was she there, and sleepless? The sky was full of light; the blanched chalk down on which he stood ran northward in a shining curve, bare in the moon; but in the hollow below, and on the horizon, the dark huddled woods kept watch, guarding the secrets of night. The owls were calling in the

trees behind him—some in faint prolonged cry, one in a sharp shrieking note. And at whiles a train rushed upon the ear, held it, and died away; or a breeze crept among the dead beech leaves at his feet. Otherwise not a sound or show of life; Marsham was alone with night and himself.

Twenty-four hours—little more—since on that same hill-side he had held Diana in his arms in the first rapture of love. What was it that had changed? How was it—for he was frank with himself—that the love which had been then the top and completion of his life, the angel of all good-fortune within and without, had become now, to some extent, a burden to be borne, an obligation to be met?

Certainly, he loved her well. But she came to him now, bringing as her marriage portion, not easy joy and success, the full years of prosperity and ambition, but poverty, effort, a certain measure of disgrace, and the perpetual presence of a ghastly and heart-breaking memory. He shrank from this last in a positive and sharp impatience. Why should Juliet Sparling's crime affect him?—depress the vigor and cheerfulness of his life?

As to the effort before him, he felt toward it as a man of weak unpractised muscle who endeavors with straining to raise a physical weight. He would make the effort, but it would tax his whole strength. As he strolled along the down, dismally smoking and pondering, he made himself contemplate the then and now—taking stock, as it were, of his life. In this truth-compelling darkness, apart from the stimulus of his mother's tyranny, he felt himself to be two men: one in love with Diana, the other in love with success and political ambition, and

money as the agent and servant of both. He had never for one moment envisaged the first love—Diana—as the alternative to, or substitute for the second love—success. As he had conceived her up to twenty-four hours before, Diana was to be, indeed, one of the chief elements and ministers of success. In winning her, he was, in fact, to make the best of both worlds. A certain cool analytic gift that he possessed put all this plainly before him. And now it must be a choice between Diana and all those other desirable things.

Take the poverty first. What would it amount to? He knew approximately what was Diana's fortune. He had meant—with easy generosity—to leave it all in her hands, to do what she would with. Now, until his mother came to her senses, they must chiefly depend upon it. What could he add to it? He had been called to the Bar, but had never practised. Directorships no doubt, he might get, like other men; though not so easily now, if it was to be known that his mother meant to make a pauper of him. And once a man whom he had met in political life, who was no doubt ignorant of his private circumstances, had sounded him as to whether he would become the London correspondent of a great American paper. He had laughed then, good-humoredly, at the proposal. Perhaps the thing might still be open. It would mean a few extra hundreds.

He laughed again as he thought of it, but not good-humoredly. The whole thing was so monstrous! His mother had close on twenty thousand a year! For all her puritanical training she liked luxury—of a certain kind—and had brought up her son in it. Marsham had never gambled or speculated or raced. It was part of his democratic creed and his Quaker ancestry to despise such

modes of wasting money, and to be scornful of the men who indulged in them. But the best of housing, service, and clothes; the best shooting, whether in England or Scotland; the best golfing, fishing, and travelling: all these had come to him year after year since his boyhood, without question. His mother, of course, had provided the majority of them, for his own small income and his allowance from her were absorbed by his personal expenses, his Parliamentary life, and the subscriptions to the party, which—in addition to his mother's—made him, as he was well aware, a person of importance in its ranks, quite apart from his record in the House.

Now all that must be given up. He would be reduced to an income—including what he imagined to be Diana's —of less than half his personal spending hitherto; and those vast perspectives implied in the inheritance at his mother's death of his father's half million must also be renounced.

No doubt he could just maintain himself in Parliament. But everything—judged by the standards he had been brought up in—would be difficult where everything till now had been ease.

He knew his mother too well to doubt her stubbornness, and his feeling was bitter, indeed. Bitter, too, against his father, who had left him in this plight. Why had his father distrusted and wronged him so? He recalled with discomfort certain collisions of his youth; certain disappointments at school and college he had inflicted on his father's ambition; certain lectures and gibes from that strong mouth, in his early manhood. Absurd! If his father had had to do with a really spendthrift and unsatisfactory son, there might have been some sense in it. But for these trifles—these suspicions—these

foolish notions of a doctrinaire—to inflict this stigma and this yoke on him all his days!

Suddenly his wanderings along the moon-lit hill came to a stand-still. For he recognized the hollow in the chalk—the gnarled thorn—the wide outlook. He stood gazing about him—a shamed lover; conscious of a dozen contradictory feelings. Beautiful and tender Diana!—"Stick to her, Oliver!—she is worth it!" Chide's eager and peremptory tone smote on the inward ear. Of course he would stick to her. The only thing which it gave him any pleasure to remember in this nightmare of a day was his own answer to Ferrier's suggestion that Diana might release him: "Do you imagine I could be such a hound as to let her?" As he said it, he had been conscious that the words rang well; that he had struck the right attitude, and done the right thing. Of course he had done the right thing! What would he, or any other decent person, have thought of a man who could draw back from his word, for such a cause?

No!—he resigned himself. He would do nothing mean and ungentlemanly. A policy of waiting and diplomacy should be tried. Ferrier might be of some use. But, if nothing availed, he must marry and make the best of it. He wondered to what charitable societies his mother would leave her money!

Slowly he strolled back along the hill. That dim light, high up on the shrouded walls of Beechcote, seemed to go with him, softly, insistently reminding him of Diana. The thought of her moved him deeply. He longed to have her in his arms, to comfort her, to feel her dependent on him for the recovery of joy and vitality. It was only by an obstinate and eager dwelling upon her sweetness and charm that he could protect himself

against the rise of an invading wave of repugnance and depression; the same repugnance, the same instinctive longing to escape, which he had always felt, as boy or man, in the presence of sickness, or death, or mourning.

Marsham had been long asleep in his queer little room at "The Green Man." The last lights were out in the village, and the moon had set. Diana stole out of bed; Muriel must not hear her, Muriel whose eyes were already so tired and tear-worn with another's grief. She went to the window, and, throwing a shawl over her, she knelt there, looking out. She was dimly conscious of stars, of the hill, the woods; what she really *saw* was a prison room as she was able to imagine it, and her mother lying there—her young mother—only four years older than she, Diana, was now. Or again she saw the court of law—the judge in the black cap—and her mother looking up. Fanny had said she was small and slight—with dark hair.

The strange frozen horror of it made tears—or sleep—or rest—impossible. She did not think much of Marsham; she could hardly remember what she had written to him. Love was only another anguish. Nor could it protect her from the images which pursued her. The only thought which seemed to soothe the torture of imagination was the thought stamped on her brain tissue by the long inheritance of centuries—the thought of Christ on Calvary. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The words repeated themselves again and again. She did not pray in words. But her agony crept to the foot of what has become through the action and interaction of two thousand years, the typical and representative agony of the world, and, clinging there,

made wild appeal, like the generations before her, to a God in whose hand lie the creatures of His will.

"Mrs. Colwood said I might come and say good-bye to you," said Fanny Merton, holding her head high.

She stood on the threshold of Diana's little sitting-room, looking in. There was an injured pride in her bearing, balanced by a certain anxiety which seemed to keep it within bounds.

"Please come in," said Diana.

She rose with difficulty from the table where she was forcing herself to write a letter. Had she followed her own will she would have been up at her usual time and down to breakfast. But she had turned faint while dressing, and Mrs. Colwood had persuaded her to let some tea be brought up-stairs.

Fanny came in, half closing the door.

"Well, I'm off," she said, flushing. "I dare say you won't want to see *me* again."

Diana came feebly forward, clinging to the chairs.

"It wasn't your fault. I must have known—some time."

Fanny looked at her uneasily.

"Well, of course, that's true. But I dare say I—well I'm no good at beating about the bush, never was! And I was in a temper, too—that was at the bottom of it."

Diana made no reply. Her eyes, magnified by exhaustion and pallor, seemed to be keeping a pitiful shrinking watch lest she should be hurt again—past bearing. It was like the shrinking of a child that has been tortured, from its tormentor.

"You are going to London?"

"Yes. You remember those Devonshire people I

went to stay with? One of the girls is up in London with her aunt. I'm going to board with them a bit."

"My lawyers will send the thousand pounds to Aunt Merton when they have arranged for it," said Diana, quietly. "Is that what you wish?"

A look of relief she could not conceal slipped into Fanny's countenance.

"You're going to give it us — after all?" she said, stumbling over the words.

"I promised to give it you."

Fanny fidgeted, but even her perceptions told her that further thanks would be out of place.

"Mother 'll write to you, of course. And you'd better send fifty pounds of it to me. I can't go home under three months, and I shall run short."

"Very well," said Diana.

"Good-bye," said Fanny, coming a little nearer. Then she looked round her, with a first genuine impulse of something like remorse—if the word is not too strong. It was rather, perhaps, a consciousness of having managed her opportunities extremely badly. "I'm sorry you didn't like me." she said, abruptly, "and I didn't mean to be nasty."

"Good-bye." Diana held out her hand; yet trembling involuntarily as she did so. Fanny broke out:

"Diana, why do you look like that? It's all so long ago—you can't do anything—you ought to try and forget it."

"No, I can't do anything," said Diana, withdrawing her right hand from her cousin, and clasping both on her breast. "I can only—"

But the word died on her lips; she turned abruptly away, adding, hurriedly, in another tone: "If you ever

want anything, you know we're always here—Mrs. Colwood and I. Please give us your address."

"Thanks." Fanny retreated; but could not forbear, as she reached the door, from letting loose the thought which burned her inner mind. She turned round deliberately. "Mr. Marsham 'll cheer you up, Diana!—you'll see. Of course, he'll behave like a gentleman. It won't make a bit of difference to you. I'll just ask Mrs. Colwood to tell me when it's all fixed up."

Diana said nothing. She was hanging over the fire, and her face was hidden. Fanny waited a moment, then opened the door and went.

As soon as the carriage conveying Miss Merton to the station had safely driven off, Mrs. Colwood, who, in no conventional sense, had been speeding the parting guest, ran up-stairs again to Diana's room.

"She's gone?" said Diana, faintly. She was standing by the window. As she spoke the carriage came into view at a bend of the drive and disappeared into the trees beyond. Mrs. Colwood saw her shiver.

"Did she leave you her address?"

"Yes. Don't think any more about her. I have something to tell you."

Diana's painful start was the measure of her state. Muriel Colwood put her arms tenderly round the slight form.

"Mr. Marsham will be here directly. He came last night—too late—I would not let him see you. Ah!" She released Diana, and made a rapid step to the window. "There he is!—coming by the fields."

Diana sat down, as though her limbs trembled under her.

"Did you send for him?"

"Yes. You forgive me?"

"Then—he hasn't got my letter."

She said it without looking up, as though to herself.

Mrs. Colwood knelt down beside her.

"It is right he should be here," she said, with energy, almost with command; "it is the right, natural thing."

Diana stooped, mechanically, and kissed her; then sprang up, quivering, the color rushing into her cheeks. "Why, he mayn't even know!" She threw a piteous look at her companion.

"He does know, dear—he does know."

Diana composed herself. She lifted her hands to a tress of hair that was unfastened, and put it in its place. Instinctively she straightened her belt, her white collar. Mrs. Colwood noticed that she was in black again, in one of the dresses of her mourning.

When Marsham turned, at the sound of the latch, to see Diana coming in, all the man's secret calculations and revolts were for the moment scattered and drowned in sheer pity and dismay. In a few short hours can grief so work on youth? He ran to her, but she held up a hand which arrested him half-way. Then she closed the door, but still stood near it, as though she feared to move, or speak, looking at him with her appealing eyes.

"Oliver!"

He held out his hands.

"My poor, poor darling!"

She gave a little cry, as though some tension broke. Her lips almost smiled; but she held him away from her.

"You're not—not ashamed of me?"

His protests were the natural, the inevitable protests that any man with red blood in his veins must need have uttered, brought face to face with so much sorrow and so much beauty. She let him make them, while her left hand gently stroked and caressed his right hand which held hers; yet all the time resolutely turning her face and her soft breast away, as though she dreaded to be kissed, to lose will and identity in the mere delight of his touch. And he felt, too, in some strange way, as though the blow that had fallen upon her had placed her at a distance from him; not disgraced—but consecrate.

"Will you please sit down and let us talk?" she said, after a moment, withdrawing herself.

She pushed a chair forward, and sat down herself. The tears were in her eyes, but she brushed them away unconsciously.

"If papa had told me!" she said, in a low voice—"if he had only told me—before he died."

"It was out of love," said Marsham; "but yes—it would have been wiser—kinder—to have spoken."

She started.

"Oh no—not that. But we might have sorrowed—together. And he was always alone—he bore it all alone—even when he was dying."

"But you, dearest, shall not bear it alone!" cried Marsham, finding her hand again and kissing it. "My first task shall be to comfort you—to make you forget."

He thought she winced at the word "forget."

"When did you first guess—or know?"

He hesitated—then thought it best to tell the truth.

"When we were in the lime-walk."

"When you asked—her name? I remember"—her

voice broke—"how you wrung my hand! And you never had any suspicion before?"

"Never. And it makes no difference, Diana—to you and me—none. I want you to understand that now—at once."

She looked at him, smiling tremulously. His words became him; even in her sorrow her eyes delighted in his shrewd thin face; in the fair hair, prematurely touched with gray, and lying heavily on the broad brow; in the intelligence and distinction of his whole aspect.

"You are so good to me—" she said, with a little sob. "No—no!—please, dear Oliver!—we have so much to talk of." And again she prevented him from taking her in his arms. "Tell me"—she laid her hand on his persuasively: "Sir James, of course, knew from the beginning?"

"Yes—from the beginning—that first night at Tallyn. He is coming down this afternoon, dearest. He knew you would want to see him. But it may not be till late."

"After all, I know so little yet," she said, bewildered. "Only—only what Fanny told me."

"What made her tell you?"

"She was angry with me—I forget about what. I did not understand at first what she was saying. Oliver"—she grasped his hand tightly, while the lids dropped over the eyes, as though she would shut out even his face as she asked her question—"is it true that—that—the death sentence—"

"Yes," said Marsham, reluctantly. "But it was at once commuted. And three weeks after the sentence she was released. She lived, Sir James tells me, nearly two months after your father brought her home."

"I wrote last night to the lawyers"—Diana breathed

it almost in a whisper. "I am sure there is a letter for me—I am sure papa wrote."

"Promise me one thing!" said Marsham. "If they send you newspapers—for my sake, don't read them. Sir James will tell you, this afternoon, things the public have never known—facts which would certainly have altered the verdict if the jury had known. Your poor mother struck the blow in what was practically an impulse of self-defence, and the evidence which mainly convicted her was perjured evidence, as the liar who gave it confessed years afterward. Sir James will tell you that. He has the confession."

Her face relaxed, her mouth trembled violently.

"Oh, Oliver!—Oliver!" She was unable to bear the relief his words brought her: she broke down under it.

He caught her in his arms at last, and she gave way—she let herself be weak—and woman. Clinging to him with all the pure passion of a woman and all the trust of a child, she felt his kisses on her cheek, and her deep sobs shook her upon his breast. Marsham's being was stirred to its depths. He gave her the best he had to give; and in that moment of mortal appeal on her side and desperate pity on his, their natures met in that fusion of spirit and desire wherewith love can lend even tragedy and pain to its own uses.

And yet—and yet!—was it in that very moment that feeling—on the man's side—"o'erleaped itself, and fell on the other"? When they resumed conversation, Marsham's tacit expectation was that Diana would now show herself comforted; that, sure of him and of his affection, she would now be ready to put the tragic past aside; to think first and foremost of her own present life and his,

and face the future cheerfully. A misunderstanding arose between them, indeed, which is, perhaps, one of the typical misunderstandings between men and women. The man, impatient of painful thoughts and recollections, eager to be quit of them as weakening and unprofitable, determined to silence them by the pleasant clamor of his own ambitions and desires; the woman, priestess of the past, clinging to all the pieties of memory, in terror lest she forget the dead, feeling it a disloyalty even to draw the dagger from the wound—between these two figures and dispositions there is a deep and natural antagonism.

It showed itself rapidly in the case of Marsham and Diana; for their moment of high feeling was no sooner over, and she sitting quietly again, her hand in his, the blinding tears dashed away, than Marsham's mind flew inevitably to his own great sacrifice. She must be comforted, indeed, poor child! yet he could not but feel that he, too, deserved consolation, and that his own most actual plight was no less worthy of her thoughts than the ghastly details of a tragedy twenty years old.

Yet she seemed to have forgotten Lady Lucy!—to have no inkling of the real situation. And he could find no way in which to break it.

For, in little broken sentences of horror and recollection, she kept going back to her mother's story—her father's silence and suffering. It was as though her mind could not disentangle itself from the load which had been flung upon it—could not recover its healthiness of action amid the phantom sights and sounds which beset imagination. Again and again she must ask him for details —and shrink from the answers; must hide her eyes with the little moan that wrung his heart; and break out in

ejaculations, as though of bewilderment, under a revelation so singular and so terrible.

It was to be expected, of course; he could only hope it would soon pass. Secretly, after a time, he was repelled and wearied. He answered her with the same tender words, he tried to be all kindness; but more perfunctorily. The oneness of that supreme moment vanished and did not return.

Meanwhile, Diana's perceptions, stunned by the one overmastering thought, gave her no warning. And, in truth, if Marsham could have understood, the process of mental recovery was set going in her by just this freedom of utterance to the man she loved—these words and looks and tears—that brought ease after the dumb horror of the first hours.

At last he made an effort, hiding the nascent impatience in a caress.

"If I could only persuade you not to dwell upon it too persistently—to put it from your thoughts as soon and as much as you can! Dear, we shall have our own anxieties!"

She looked up with a sudden start.

"My mother," he said, reluctantly, "may give us trouble."

The color rushed into Diana's cheeks, and ebbed with equal suddenness.

"Lady Lucy! Oh!—how could I forget? Oliver!—she thinks—I am not fit!"

And in her eyes he saw for the first time the self-abasement he had dreaded, yet perhaps expected, to see there before. For in her first question to him there had been no real doubt of him; it had been the natural humility of wounded love that cries out, expecting the reply that no

power on earth could check itself from giving were the case reversed.

"Dearest! you know my mother's bringing up: her Quaker training, and her rather stern ideas. We shall persuade her—in time."

"In time? And now—she—she forbids it?"

Her voice faltered. And yet, unconsciously, she had drawn herself a little together and away.

Marsham began to give a somewhat confused and yet guarded account of his mother's state of mind, endeavoring to prepare her for the letter which might arrive on the morrow. He got up and moved about the room as he spoke, while Diana sat, looking at him, her lips trembling from time to time. Presently he mentioned Ferrier's name, and Diana started.

"Does *he* think it would do you harm—that you ought to give me up?"

"Not he! And if anybody can make my mother hear reason, it will be Ferrier."

"Lady Lucy believes it would injure you in Parliament?" faltered Diana.

"No, I don't believe she does. No sane person could."

"Then it's because—of the disgrace? Oliver!—perhaps—you ought to give me up?"

She breathed quick. It stabbed him to see the flush in her cheeks contending with the misery in her eyes. She could not pose, or play a part. What she could not hide from him was just the conflict between her love and her new-born shame. Before that scene on the hill there would have been her girlish dignity also to reckon with. But the greater had swallowed up the less; and from her own love—in innocent and simple faith—she imagined his.

So that when she spoke of his giving her up, it was not her pride that spoke, but only and truly her fear of doing him a hurt—by which she meant a hurt in public estimation or repute. The whole business side of the matter was unknown to her. She had never speculated on his circumstances, and she was constitutionally and rather proudly indifferent to questions of money. Vaguely, of course, she knew that the Marshams were rich and that Tallyn was Lady Lucy's. Beyond, she had never inquired.

This absence of all self-love in her attitude—together with her complete ignorance of the calculation in which she was involved—touched him sharply. It kept him silent about the money; it seemed impossible to speak of it. And yet all the time the thought of it clamored—perhaps increasingly—in his own mind.

He told her that they must stand firm—that she must be patient—that Ferrier would work for them—and Lady Lucy would come round. And she, loving him more and more with every word, seeing in him a god of consolation and of chivalry, trusted him wholly. It was characteristic of her that she did not attempt heroics for the heroics' sake; there was no idea of renouncing him with a flourish of trumpets. He said he loved her, and she believed him. But her heart went on its knees to him in a gratitude that doubled love, even in the midst of her aching bewilderment and pain.

He made her come out with him before luncheon; he talked with her of politics and their future; he did his best to scatter the nightmare in which she moved.

But after awhile he felt his efforts fail. The scenes that held her mind betrayed themselves in her recurrent

pallor, the trembling of her hand in his, her piteous, sudden looks. She did not talk of her mother, but he could not presently rouse her to talk of anything else; she sat silent in her chair, gazing before her, her slender hands on her knee, dreaming and forlorn.

Then he remembered, and with involuntary relief, that he must get back to town, and to the House, for an important division. He told her, and she made no protest. Evidently she was already absorbed in the thought of Sir James Chide's visit. But when the time came for him to go she let herself be kissed, and then, as he was moving away, she caught his hand, and held it wildly to her lips.

"Oh, if you hadn't come!—if you hadn't come!" Her tears fell on the hand.

"But I did come!" he said, caressing her. "I was here last night—did Mrs. Colwood tell you? Afterward —in the dark—I walked up to the hill, only to look down upon this house, that held you."

"If I had known," she murmured, on his breast, "I should have slept."

He went—in exaltation; overwhelmed by her charm even in this eclipse of grief, and by the perception of her passion.

But before he was half-way to London he felt that he had been rather foolish and quixotic in not having told her simply and practically what his mother's opposition meant. She must learn it some day; better from him than others. His mother, indeed, might tell her in the letter she had threatened to write. But he thought not. Nobody was more loftily secret as to business affairs than Lady Lucy; money might not have existed for the rare mention she made of

it. No; she would base her opposition on other grounds.

These reflections brought him back to earth, and to the gloomy pondering of the situation. Half a million! —because of the ill-doing of a poor neurotic woman— twenty years ago!

It filled him with a curious resentment against Juliet Sparling herself, which left him still more out of sympathy with Diana's horror and grief. It must really be understood, when they married, that Mrs. Sparling's name was never to be mentioned between them—that the whole grimy business was buried out of sight forever.

And with a great and morbid impatience he shook the recollection from him. The bustle of Whitehall, as he drove down it, was like wine in his veins; the crowd and the gossip of the Central Lobby, as he pressed his way through to the door of the House of Commons, had never been so full of stimulus or savor. In this agreeable, exciting world he knew his place; the relief was enormous; and, for a time, Marsham was himself again.

Sir James Chide came in the late afternoon; and in her two hours with him, Diana learned, from lips that spared her all they could, the heart-breaking story of which Fanny had given her but the crudest outlines.

The full story, and its telling, taxed the courage both of hearer and speaker. Diana bore it, as it seemed to Sir James, with the piteous simplicity of one in whose nature grief had no pretences to overcome. The iron entered into her soul, and her quick imagination made her torment. But her father had taught her lessons of self-conquest, and in this first testing of her youth she did not fail. Sir James was astonished at the quiet she

was able to maintain, and touched to the heart by the suffering she could not conceal.

Nothing was said of his own relation to her mother's case; but he saw that she understood it, and their hearts moved together. When he rose to take his leave she held his hand in hers with such a look in her eyes as a daughter might have worn; and he, with an emotion to which he gave little outward expression, vowed to himself that henceforward she should lack no fatherly help or counsel that he could give her.

He gathered, with relief, that the engagement persisted, and the perception led him to praise Marsham in a warm Irish way. But he could not find anything hopeful to say of Lady Lucy. "If you only hold to each other, my dear young lady, things will come right!" Diana flushed and shrank a little, and he felt—helplessly—that the battle was for their fighting, and not his.

Meanwhile, as he had seen Mr. Riley, he did his best to prepare her for the letters and enclosures, which had been for twenty years in the custody of the firm, and would reach her on the morrow.

But what he did not prepare her for was the letter from Lady Lucy Marsham which reached Beechcote by the evening post, after Sir James had left.

The letter lay awhile on Diana's knee, unopened. Muriel Colwood, glancing at her, went away with the tears in her eyes, and at last the stumbling fingers broke the seal.

"My dear Miss Mallory,—I want you to understand why it is that I must oppose your marriage with my son. You know well, I think, how gladly I should have welcomed you as a daughter but for this terrible revelation. As it is, I cannot consent to the engagement, and if it is carried out Oliver must

renounce the inheritance of his father's fortune. I do not say this as any vulgar threat. It is simply that I cannot allow my husband's wealth to be used in furthering what he would never have permitted. He had—and so have I—the strongest feeling as to the sacredness of the family and its traditions. He held, as I do, that it ought to be founded in mutual respect and honor, and that children should have round about them the help that comes from the memory of unstained and God-fearing ancestors. Do you not also feel this? Is it not a great principle, to which personal happiness and gratification may justly be sacrificed? And would not such a sacrifice bring with it the highest happiness of all?

"Do not think that I am cruel or hard-hearted. I grieve for you with all my soul, and I have prayed for you earnestly, though, perhaps, you will consider this mere hypocrisy. But I must first think of my son—and of my husband. Very possibly you and Oliver may disregard what I say. But if so, I warn you that Oliver is not indifferent to money, simply because the full development of his career depends on it. He will regret what he has done, and your mutual happiness will be endangered. Moreover, he shrinks from all painful thoughts and associations; he seems to have no power to bear them; yet how can you protect him from them?

"I beg you to be counselled in time, to think of him rather than yourself—if, indeed, you care for him. And should you decide rightly, an old woman's love and gratitude will be yours as long as she lives.

"Believe me, dear Miss Mallory, very sincerely yours,

"Lucy Marsham."

Diana dragged herself up-stairs and locked her door. At ten o'clock Mrs. Colwood knocked, and heard a low voice asking to be left alone. She went away wondering, in her astonishment and terror, what new blow had fallen. No sound reached her during the night—except the bluster of a north wind rushing in great gusts upon the hill-side and the woods.

CHAPTER XIV

LATE on Monday afternoon Lady Niton paid a call in Eaton Square. She and Lady Lucy were very old friends, and rarely passed a week when they were both in town without seeing each other.

Mr. Ferrier lunched with her on Monday, and casually remarked that Lady Lucy was not as well as usual. Lady Niton replied that she would look her up that afternoon; and she added: "And what about that procrastinating fellow Oliver? Is he engaged yet?"

"Not to my knowledge," said Mr. Ferrier, after a pause.

"Then he ought to be! What on earth is he shilly-shallying for? In my days young men had proper blood in their veins."

Ferrier did not pursue the subject, and Lady Niton at once jumped to the conclusion that something had happened. By five o'clock she was in Eaton Square.

Only Alicia Drake was in the drawing-room when she was announced.

"I hear Lucy's seedy," said the old lady, abruptly, after vouchsafing a couple of fingers to Miss Drake. "I suppose she's been starving herself, as usual?"

Oliver's mother enjoyed an appetite as fastidious as her judgments on men and morals, and Lady Niton had a running quarrel with her on the subject.

Alicia replied that it had been, indeed, unusually difficult of late to persuade Lady Lucy to eat.

"The less you eat the less you may eat," said Lady Niton, with vigor. "The stomach contracts unless you give it something to do. That's what's the matter with Lucy, my dear—though, of course, I never dare name the organ. But I suppose she's been worrying herself about something?"

"I am afraid she has."

"Is Oliver engaged?" asked Lady Niton, suddenly, observing the young lady.

Alicia replied demurely that that question had perhaps better be addressed to Lady Lucy.

"What's the matter? Can't the young people make up their minds? Do they want Lucy to make them up for them?"

Alicia looked at her companion a little under her brows, and did not reply. Lady Niton was so piqued by the girl's expression that she immediately threw herself on the mystery she divined—tearing and scratching at it, like a dog in a rabbit-hole. And very soon she had dragged it to the light. Miss Drake merely remarked that it was very sad, but it appeared that Miss Mallory was not really a Mallory at all, but the daughter of a certain Mrs. Sparling—Juliet Sparling, who—"

"Juliet Sparling!" cried Lady Niton, her queer small eyes starting in their sockets. "My dear, you must be mad!"

Alicia smiled, though gravely. She was afraid Lady Niton would find that what she said was true.

A cross-examination followed, after which Lady Niton sat speechless for a while. She took a fan out of her large reticule and fanned herself, a proceeding by which she often protested against the temperature at which Lady Lucy kept her drawing-room. She then asked for

a window to be opened, and when she had been sufficiently oxygenated she delivered herself:

"Well, and why not? We really didn't have the picking and choosing of our mothers or fathers, though Lucy always behaves as though we had—to the fourth generation. Besides, I always took the side of that poor creature, and Lucy believed the worst—as usual. Well, and so she's going to make Oliver back out of it?"

At this point the door opened, and Lady Lucy glided in, clad in a frail majesty which would have overawed any one but Elizabeth Niton. Alicia discreetly disappeared, and Lady Niton, after an inquiry as to her friend's health—delivered, as it were, at the point of the bayonet, and followed by a flying remark on the absurdity of treating your body as if it were only given you to be harried—plunged headlong into the great topic. What an amazing business! Now at last one would see what Oliver was made of!

Lady Lucy summoned all her dignity, expounded her view, and entirely declined to be laughed or rated out of it. For Elizabeth Niton, her wig much awry, her old eyes and cheeks blazing, took up the cause of Diana with alternate sarcasm and eloquence. As for the social disrepute—stuff! All that was wanting to such a beautiful creature as Diana Mallory was a story and a scandal. Positively she would be the rage, and Oliver's fortune was made.

Lady Lucy sat in pale endurance, throwing in an occasional protest, not budging by one inch—and no doubt reminding herself from time to time, in the intervals of her old friend's attacks, of the letter she had just despatched to Beechcote — until, at last, Lady

Niton, having worked herself up into a fine frenzy to no purpose at all, thought it was time to depart.

"Well, my dear," she said, leaning on her stick, the queerest rag-bag of a figure—crooked wig, rusty black dress, and an unspeakable bonnet—"you are a saint, of course, and I am a quarrelsome old sinner; I like society, and you, I believe, regard it as a grove of barren fig-trees. I don't care a rap for my neighbor if he doesn't amuse me, and you live in a puddle of good works. But, upon my word, I wouldn't be you when it comes to the sheep and the goats business! Here is a young girl, sweet and good and beautifully brought up—money and manners and everything handsome about her—she is in love with Oliver, and he with her—and just because you happen to find out that she is the daughter of a poor creature who made a tragic mess of her life, and suffered for it infinitely more than you and I are ever likely to suffer for our intolerably respectable peccadilloes—you will break her heart and his—if he's the good-luck to have one!—and there you sit, looking like a suffering angel, and expecting all your old friends, I suppose, to pity and admire you. Well, I won't, Lucy!—I won't! That's flat. There's my hand. Good-bye!"

Lady Lucy took it patiently, though from no other person in the world save Elizabeth Niton would she have so taken it.

"I thought, Elizabeth, you would have tried to understand me."

Elizabeth Niton shook her head.

"There's only your Maker could do that, Lucy. And He must be pretty puzzled to account for you sometimes. Good-bye. I thought Alicia looked uncommonly cheerful!"

This last remark was delivered as a parting shot as Lady Niton hobbled to the door. She could not, however, resist pausing to see its effect. Lady Lucy turned indignantly.

"I don't know what you mean by that remark. Alicia has behaved with great kindness and tact!"

"I dare say! We're all darlings when we get our way. What does Ferrier say?"

Lady Lucy hesitated.

"If my old friends cannot see it as I do—if they blame me—I am very sorry. But it is my responsibility."

"A precious good thing, my dear, for everybody else! But as far as I can make out, they *are* engaged?"

"Nothing is settled," said Lady Lucy, hastily; "and I need not say, Elizabeth, that if you have any affection for us—or any consideration for Miss Mallory—you will not breathe a word of this most sad business to anybody."

"Well, for Oliver's sake, if he doesn't intend to behave like a man, I do certainly hope it may be kept dark!" cried Lady Niton. "For if he does desert her, under such circumstances, I suppose you know that a great many people will be inclined to cut him? I shall hold my tongue. But, of course, it will come out."

With which final shaft she departed, leaving Lady Lucy a little uneasy. She mentioned Elizabeth Niton's "foolish remark" to Mrs. Fotheringham in the course of the evening. Isabel Fotheringham laughed it to scorn.

"You may be quite sure there will be plenty of ill-natured talk either way, whether Oliver gives her up or doesn't. The real thing to bear in mind is that if Oliver yields to your wishes, mamma—as you certainly deserve that he should, after all you have done for him—he will be delivered from an ignorant and reactionary wife who

might have spoiled his career. I like to call a spade a spade. Oliver belongs to his *party*, and his party have a right to count upon him. He has no right to jeopardize either his opinions or his money; *we* have a claim on both."

Lady Lucy gave an unconscious sigh. She was glad of any arguments, from anybody, that offered her support. But it did occur to her that if Diana Mallory had not shown a weakness for the soldiers of her country, and if her heart had been right on Women's Suffrage, Isabel would have judged her case differently; so that her approval was not worth all it might have been.

Meanwhile, in the House of Commons, Isabel Fotheringham's arguments was being put in other forms.

On the Tuesday morning Marsham went down to the House, for a Committee, in a curious mood—half love, half martyrdom. The thought of Diana was very sweet; it warmed and thrilled his heart. But somehow, with every hour, he realized more fully what a magnificent thing he was doing, and how serious was his position.

In a few hurried words with Ferrier, before the meeting of the House, Marsham gave the result of his visit to Beechcote. Diana had been, of course, very much shaken, but was bearing the thing bravely. They were engaged, but nothing was to be said in public for at least six months, so as to give Lady Lucy time to reconsider.

"Though, of course, I know, as far as that is concerned, we might as well be married to-morrow and have done with it!"

"Ah!—but it is due to her—to your mother."

"I suppose it is. But the whole situation is grotesque.

I must look out for some way of making money. Any suggestions thankfully received!"

Marsham spoke with an irritable flippancy. Ferrier's hazel eyes, set and almost lost in spreading cheeks, dwelt upon him thoughtfully.

"All right; I will think of some. You explained the position to Miss Mallory?"

"No," said Marsham, shortly. "How could I?"

The alternatives flew through Ferrier's mind: "Cowardice?—or delicacy?" Aloud, he said: "I am afraid she will not be long in ignorance. It will be a big fight for her, too."

Marsham shrugged his thin shoulders.

"Of course. And all for nothing. Hullo, Fleming!—do you want me?"

For the Liberal Chief Whip had paused beside them where they stood, in a corner of the smoking-room, as though wishing to speak to one or other of them, yet not liking to break up their conversation.

"Don't let me interrupt," he said to Marsham. "But can I have a word presently?"

"Now, if you like."

"Come to the Terrace," said the other, and they went out into the gray of a March afternoon. There they walked up and down for some time, engaged in an extremely confidential conversation. Signs of a general election were beginning to be strong and numerous. The Tory Government was weakening visibly, and the Liberals felt themselves in sight of an autumn, if not a summer, dissolution. But—funds!—there was the rub. The party coffers were very poorly supplied, and unless they could be largely replenished, and at once, the prospects of the election were not rosy.

Marsham had hitherto counted as one of the men on whom the party could rely. It was known that his own personal resources were not great, but he commanded his mother's ample purse. Lady Lucy had always shown herself both loyal and generous, and at her death it was, of course, assumed that he would be her heir. Lady Lucy's check, in fact, sent, through her son, to the leading party club, had been of considerable importance in the election five years before this date, in which Marsham himself had been returned; the Chief Whip wanted to assure himself that in case of need it would be repeated.

But for the first time in a conversation of this kind Marsham's reply was halting and uncertain. He would do his best, but he could not pledge himself. When the Chief Whip, disappointed and astonished, broke up their conference, Marsham walked into the House after him, in the morbid belief that a large part of his influence and prestige with his party was already gone. Let those fellows, he thought, who imagine that the popular party can be run without money, inform themselves, and not talk like asses!

In the afternoon, during an exciting debate on a subject Marsham had made to some extent his own, and in which he was expected to speak, two letters were brought to him. One was from Diana. He put it into his pocket, feeling an instinctive recoil—with his speech in sight—from the emotion it must needs express and arouse. The other was from the chairman of a Committee in Dunscombe, the chief town of his division. The town was, so far, without any proper hall for public meetings. It was proposed to build a new Liberal Club with a hall at-

tached. The leading local supporter of the scheme wrote —with apologies—to ask Marsham what he was prepared to subscribe. It was early days to make the inquiry, but—in confidence—he might state that he was afraid local support for the scheme would mean more talk than money. Marsham pondered the letter gloomily. A week earlier he would have gone to his mother for a thousand pounds without any doubt of her reply.

It was just toward the close of the dinner-hour that Marsham caught the Speaker's eye. Perhaps the special effort that had been necessary to recall his thoughts to the point had given his nerves a stimulus. At any rate, he spoke unusually well, and sat down amid the cheers of his party, conscious that he had advanced his Parliamentary career. A good many congratulations reached him during the evening; he "drank delight of battle with his peers," for the division went well, and when he left the House at one o'clock in the morning it was in a mood of tingling exhilaration, and with a sense of heightened powers.

It was not till he reached his own room, in his mother's hushed and darkened house, that he opened Diana's letter.

The mere sight of it, as he drew it out of his pocket, jarred upon him strangely. It recalled to him the fears and discomforts, the sense of sudden misfortune and of ugly associations, which had been, for a time, obliterated in the stress and interest of politics. He opened it almost reluctantly, wondering at himself.

"My dear Oliver,—This letter from your mother reached me last night. I don't know what to say, though I have thought for many hours. I ought not to do you this great injury; that seems plain to me. Yet, then, I think of all you said to me,

and I feel you must decide. You must do what is best for your future and your career; and I shall never blame you, *whatever* you think right. I wish I had known, or realized, the whole truth about your mother when you were still here. It was my stupidity.

"I have no claim—none—against what is best for you. Just two words, Oliver!—and I think they *ought* to be 'Good-bye.'

"Sir James Chide came after you left, and was most dear and kind. To-day I have my father's letter—and one from my mother—that she wrote for me—twenty years ago. I mustn't write any more. My eyes are so tired.

"Your grateful DIANA."

He laid down the blurred note, and turned to the enclosure. Then he read his mother's letter. And he had imagined, in his folly, that his mother's refinement would at least make use of some other weapon than the money! Why, it was *all* money!—a blunderbuss of the crudest kind, held at Diana's head in the crudest way. This is how the saints behave—the people of delicacy—when it comes to a pinch! He saw his mother stripped of all her pretensions, her spiritual airs, and for the first time in his life—his life of unwilling subordination—he dared to despise her.

But neither contempt nor indignation helped him much. How was he to answer Diana? He paced up and down for an hour considering it, then sat down and wrote.

His letter ran as follows:

"DEAREST DIANA,—I asked you to be my wife, and I stand by my word. I did not like to say too much about my mother's state of mind when we were together yesterday, but I am afraid it is very true that she will withdraw her present allowance to me, and deprive me of the money which my father left. Most unjustly, as it has always seemed to me, she has complete control over it. Never mind. I must see what can be done.

No doubt my political career will be, for a time, much affected. We must hope it will only be for a time.

"Ferrier and Sir James believe that my mother cannot maintain her present attitude. But I do not, alack! share their belief. I realize, as no one can who does not live in the same house with her, the strength and obstinacy of her will. She will, I suppose, leave my father's half-million to some of the charitable societies in which she believes, and we must try and behave as though it had never existed. I don't regret it for myself. But, of course, there are many public causes one would have liked to help.

"If I can, I will come down to Beechcote on Saturday again. Meanwhile, do let me urge you to take care of your health, and not to dwell too much on a past that nothing can alter. I understand, of course, how it must affect you; but I am sure it will be best—best, indeed, for us both—that you should now put it as much as possible out of your mind. It may not be possible to hide the sad truth. I fear it will not be. But I am sure that the less said—or even thought—about it, the better. You won't think me unkind, will you?

"You will see a report of my speech in the debate to-morrow. It certainly made an impression, and I must manage, if I can, to stick to Parliament. But we will consult when we meet.

"Your most loving OLIVER."

As he wrote it Marsham had been uncomfortably conscious of another self beside him—mocking, or critical. "I don't regret it for myself." Pshaw! What was there to choose between him and his mother? There, on his writing-table, lay a number of recent bills, and some correspondence as to a Scotch moor he had persuaded his mother to take for the coming season. There was now to be an end, he supposed, to the expenditure which the bills represented, and an end to expensive moors. "I don't regret it for myself." Damned humbug! When did any man, brought up in wealth, make the cold descent to poverty and self-denial without caring? Yet he let the sentence stand. He was too sleepy, too inert, to rewrite it.

And how cold were all his references to the catastrophe! He groaned as he thought of Diana—as though he actually saw the vulture gnawing at the tender breast. Had she slept?—had the tears stopped? Let him tear up the beastly thing, and begin again!

No. His head fell forward on his arm. Some dull weight of character — of disillusion — interposed. He could do no better. He shut, stamped, and posted what he had written.

At mid-day, in her Brookshire village, Diana received the letter—with another from London, in a handwriting she did not know.

When she had read Marsham's it dropped from her hand. The color flooded her cheeks—as though the heart leaped beneath a fresh blow which it could not realize or measure. Was it so she would have written to Oliver if—

She was sitting at her writing-table in the drawing-room. Her eyes wandered through the mullioned window beside her to the hill-side and the woods. This was Wednesday. Four days since, among those trees, Oliver had spoken to her. During those four days it seemed to her that, in the old Hebrew phrase, she had gone down into the pit. All the nameless dreads and terrors of her youth, all the intensified fears of the last few weeks, had in a few minutes become real and verified—only in a shape infinitely more terrible than any fear among them all had ever dared to prophesy. The story of her mother —the more she knew of it, the more she realized it, the more sharply it bit into the tissues of life; the more it seemed to set Juliet Sparling and Juliet Sparling's child alone by themselves—in a dark world. Diana had never

yet had the courage to venture out-of-doors since the news came to her; she feared to see even her old friends the Roughsedges, and had been invisible to them since the Saturday; she feared even the faces of the village children.

All through she seemed to have been clinging to Marsham's supporting hand as to the clew which might—when nature had had its way—lead her back out of this labyrinth of pain. But surely he would let her sorrow awhile!—would sorrow with her. Under the strange coldness and brevity of his letter, she felt like the children in the market-place of old—"We have mourned unto you, and ye have not wept."

Yet if her story was not to be a source of sorrow—of divine pity—it could only be a source of disgrace and shame. Tears might wash it out! But to hate and resent it—so it seemed to her—must be—in a world, where every detail of such a thing was or would be known—to go through life branded and crushed by it. If the man who was to be her husband could only face it thus (by a stern ostracism of the dead, by silencing all mention of them between himself and her), her cheeks could never cease to burn, her heart to shrink.

Now at last she felt herself weighed indeed to the earth, because Marsham, in that measured letter, had made her realize the load on him.

All that huge wealth he was to give up for her? His mother had actually the power to strip him of his inheritance?—and would certainly exercise it to punish him for marrying her—Diana?

Humiliation came upon her like a flood, and a bitter insight followed. Between the lines of the letter she read the reluctance, the regrets of the man who had written it.

She saw that he would be faithful to her if he could, but that in her own concentration of love she had accepted what Oliver had not in truth the strength to give her. The Marsham she loved had suddenly disappeared, and in his place was a Marsham whom she might—at a personal cost he would never forget, and might never forgive—persuade or compel to marry her.

She sprang up. For the first time since the blow had fallen, vigor had returned to her movements and life to her eyes.

"Ah, no!" she said to herself, panting a little. "*No!*"

A letter fell to the ground—the letter in the unknown handwriting. Some premonition made her open it and prepared her for the signature.

"My dear Miss Mallory,—I heard of the sad discovery which had taken place, from my cousin, Miss Drake, on Sunday morning, and came up at once from the country to be with my mother; for I know well with what sympathy she had been following Oliver's wishes and desires. It is a very painful business. I do most truly regret the perplexing situation in which you find yourself, and I am sure you will not resent it if, as Oliver's sister, I write you my views on the matter.

"I am afraid it is useless to expect that my mother should give way. And, then, the question is, What is the right course for you and Oliver to pursue? I understand that he proposed to you, and you accepted him, in ignorance of the melancholy truth. And, like a man of honor, he proposes to stand by his engagement—unless, of course, you release him.

"Now, if I were in your place, I should expect to consider such a matter not as affecting myself only, but in its relation to society—and the community. Our first duty is to Society. We owe it everything, and we must not act selfishly toward it. Consider Oliver's position. He has his foot on the political ladder. Every session his influence in Parliament increases. His speech to-night was—as I hear from a man who has just come from the debate—the most briliant he has yet made. It is extremely likely that when our party comes in again he will

have office, and in ten or fifteen years' time what is there to prevent his being even Prime Minister?—with all the mighty influence over millions of human beings which that means?

"But to give him every chance in his career money is, unfortunately, indispensable. Every English Prime Minister has been a rich man. It may be a blot on our English life. I think it is. But, then, I have been all my life on the side of the poor. You, who are a Tory and an Imperialist, who sympathize with militarism and with war, will agree that it is important our politicians should be among the 'Haves,' that a man's possessions *do* matter to his party and his cause.

"They matter especially—at the present moment—to *our* party and *our* cause. We are the poor party, and our rich men are few and far between.

"You may say that you would help him, and that your own money would be at his disposal. But could a man live upon his wife, in such circumstances, with any self-respect? Of course, I know that you are very young, and I trust that your views on many subjects, social and political, will change, and change materially, before long. It is a serious thing for women nowadays to throw themselves across the path of progress. At the same time I see that you have a strong—if I may say so—a vehement character. It may not be easy for you to cast off at once what, I understand, has been your father's influence. And meanwhile Oliver would be fighting all your father's and your ideas—largely on your money; for he has only a thousand a year of his own.

"Please let me assure you that I am not influenced by my mother's views. She attaches importance—an exaggerated—if she were not my mother, I should say an absurd—importance, to the family. Whereas, ideas—the great possibilities of the future—when free men and women shall lead a free and noble life—these are what influence *me*—these are what I live for.

"It will cause you both pain to separate. I know that. But summon a rational will to your aid, and you will soon see that passion is a poor thing compared to impersonal and unselfish aims. The cause of women—their political and social enfranchisement—the freeing of men from the curse of militarism—of both men and women from the patriotic lies which make us bullies and cowards—it is to these I would invite you—when you have overcome a mere personal grief.

"I fear I shall seem to you a voice crying in the wilderness; but I write in Oliver's interest—and your own.

"Yours sincerely,

"ISABEL FOTHERINGHAM.

"P.S. Our secretary, Mrs. Derrick Smith, at the Mary Wollstonecraft Club, will always be glad to send you any literature you might require."

Diana read to the end. She put it down with something like a smile. As she paced the room, her head thrown back, her hands behind her, the weight had been lifted from her; she breathed from a freer breast.

Very soon she went back to her desk and began to write.

"MY DEAR OLIVER,—I did not realize how things were when you came yesterday Now I see. You must not marry me. I could not bear to bring poverty upon you, and—to-day—I do not feel that I have the strength to meet your mother's and your sister's opposition.

"Will you please tell Lady Lucy and Mrs. Fotheringham that I have received their letters? It will not be necessary to answer them. You will tell them that I have broken off the engagement.

"You were very good to me yesterday. I thank you with all my heart. But it is not in my power—yet—to forget it all. My mother was so young—and it seems but the other day.

"I would not injure your career for the world. I hope that all good will come to you—always.

"Probably Mrs. Colwood and I shall go abroad for a little while. I want to be alone—and it will be easiest so. Indeed, if possible, we shall leave London to-morrow night. Good-bye.

"DIANA."

She rose, and stood looking down upon the letter. A thought struck her. Would he take the sentence giving the probable time of her departure as an invitation to him to come and meet her at the station?—as showing a hope that he might yet persist—and prevail?

She stooped impetuously to rewrite the letter. Instead, her tears fell on it. Sobbing, she put it up—she pressed it to her lips. If he did come—might they not press hands?—look into each other's eyes?—just once, once more?

An hour later the home was in a bustle of packing and housekeeping arrangements. Muriel Colwood, with a small set face and lips, and eyes that would this time have scorned to cry, was writing notes and giving directions. Meanwhile, Diana had written to Mrs. Roughsedge, and, instead of answering the letter, the recipient appeared in person, breathless with the haste she had made, the gray curls displaced.

Diana told her story, her slender fingers quivering in the large motherly hand whose grasp soothed her, her eyes avoiding the tender dismay and pity writ large on the old face beside her; and at the end she said, with an effort:

"Perhaps you have all expected me to be engaged to Mr. Marsham. He did propose to me—but—I have refused him."

She faltered a little as she told her first falsehood, but she told it.

"My dear!" cried Mrs. Roughsedge, "he can't—he won't—accept that! If he ever cared for you, he will care for you tenfold more now!"

"It was I," said Diana, hurriedly—"I have done it. And, please, I would rather it were now all forgotten. Nobody else need know, need they, that he proposed?"

She stroked her friend's hand piteously. Mrs. Roughsedge, foreseeing the storm of gossip that would be sweeping in a day or two through the village and the

neighborhood, could not command herself to speak. Her questions—her indignation—choked her. At the end of the conversation, when Diana had described such plans as she had, and the elder lady rose to go, she said, faltering:

"May Hugh come and say good-bye?"

Diana shrank a moment, and then assented. Mrs. Roughsedge folded the girl to her heart, and fairly broke down. Diana comforted her; but it seemed as if her own tears were now dry. When they were parting, she called her friend back a moment.

"I think," she said, steadily, "it would be best now that everybody here should know what my name was, and who I am. Will you tell the Vicar, and anybody else you think of? I shall come back to live here. I know everybody will be kind—" Her voice died away.

The March sun had set and the lamps were lit when Hugh Roughsedge entered the drawing-room where Diana sat writing letters, paying bills, absorbing herself in all the details of departure. The meeting between them was short. Diana was embarrassed, above all, by the tumult of suppressed feeling she divined in Roughsedge. For the first time she must perforce recognize what hitherto she had preferred not to see: what now she was determined not to know. The young soldier, on his side, was stifled by his own emotions—wrath—contempt—pity; and by a maddening desire to wrap this pale stricken creature in his arms, and so protect her from an abominable world. But something told him—to his despair—that she had been in Marsham's arms; had given her heart irrevocably; and that, Marsham's wife or no, all was done and over for him, Hugh Roughsedge.

Yet surely in time—in time! That was the inner clamor of the mind, as he bid her good-bye, after twenty minutes' disjointed talk, in which, finally, neither dared to go beyond commonplace. Only at the last, as he held her hand, he asked her:

"I may write to you from Nigeria?"

Rather shyly, she assented; adding, with a smile:

"But I am a bad letter-writer!"

"You are an angel!" he said, hoarsely, lifted her hand, kissed it, and rushed away.

She was shaken by the scene, and had hardly composed herself again to a weary grappling with business when the front door bell rang once more, and the butler appeared.

"Mr. Lavery wishes to know, miss, if you will see him."

The Vicar! Diana's heart sank. Must she? But some deep instinct—some yearning—interfered, and she bade him be admitted.

Then she stood waiting, dreading some onslaught on the secrets of her mind and heart—some presumption in the name of religion.

The tall form entered, in the close-buttoned coat, the gaunt oblong of the face poked forward, between the large protruding ears, the spectacled eyes blinking.

"May I come in? I will only keep you a few minutes."

She came forward and gave him her hand. The door shut behind him.

"Won't you sit down?"

"I think not. You must be very busy. I only came to say a few words. Miss Mallory!"

He still held her hand. Diana trembled, and looked up.

"—I fear you may have thought me harsh. I blame myself in many respects. Will you forgive me? Mrs. Roughsedge has told me what you wished her to tell me. Before you go, will you still let me give you Christ's message?"

The tears rushed back to Diana's eyes; she looked at him silently.

"'Blessed are they that mourn,'" he said, gently, with a tender dignity, "'for they shall be comforted!'"

Their eyes met. From the man's face and manner everything had dropped but the passion of Christian charity, mingled with a touch of remorse—as though, in what had been revealed to him, the servant had realized some mysterious rebuke of his Lord.

"Remember that!" he went on. "Your mourning is your blessing. God's love will come to you through it—and the sense of fellowship with Christ. Don't cast it from you—don't put it away."

"I know," she said, brokenly. "It is agony, but it is sacred."

His eyes grew dim. She withdrew her hand, and they talked a little about her journey.

"But you will come back," he said to her, presently, with earnestness; "your friends here will think it an honor and a privilege to welcome you."

"Oh yes, I shall come back. Unless—I have some friends in London—East London. Perhaps I might work there."

He shook his head.

"No, you are not strong enough. Come back here. There is God's work to be done in this village, Miss Mallory. Come and put your hand to it. But not yet—not yet."

Then her weariness told him that he had said enough, and he went.

Late that night Diana tore herself from Muriel Colwood, went alone to her room, and locked her door. Then she drew back the curtains, and gazed once more on the same line of hills she had seen rise out of the wintry mists on Christmas morning. The moon was still behind the down, and a few stars showed among the clouds.

She turned away, unlocked a drawer, and, falling upon her knees by the bed, she spread out before her the fragile and time-stained paper that held her mother's last words to her.

"My little Diana—my precious child,—It may be—it will be —years before this reaches you. I have made your father promise to let you grow up without any knowledge or reminder of me. It was difficult, but at last—he promised. Yet there must come a time when it will hurt you to think of your mother. When it does — listen, my darling. Your father knows that I loved him always! He knows — and he has forgiven. He knows too what I did—and how—so does Sir James. There is no place, no pardon for me on earth—but you may still love me, Diana—still love me—and pray for me. Oh, my little one!—they brought you in to kiss me a little while ago—and you looked at me with your blue deep eyes—and then you kissed me—so softly—a little strangely—with your cool lips—and now I have made the nurse lift me up that I may write. A few days —perhaps even a few hours—will bring me rest. I long for it. And yet it is sweet to be with your father, and to hear your little feet on the stairs. But most sweet, perhaps, because it must end so soon. Death makes these days possible, and for that I bless and welcome death. I seem to be slipping away on the great stream—so gently—tired—only your father's hand. Good-bye—my precious Diana—your dying—and very weary

"Mother."

The words sank into Diana's young heart. They dulled the smart of her crushed love; they awakened a

sense of those forces ineffable and majestic, terrible and yet "to be entreated," which hold and stamp the human life. Oliver had forsaken her. His kiss was still on her lips. Yet he had forsaken her. She must stand alone. Only—in the spirit—she put out clinging hands; she drew her mother to her breast; she smiled into her father's eyes. One with them; and so one with all who suffer! She offered her life to those great Forces; to the hidden Will. And thus, after three days of torture, agony passed into a trance of ecstasy—of aspiration.

But these were the exaltations of night and silence. With the returning day, Diana was again the mere girl, struggling with misery and nervous shock. In the middle of the morning arrived a special messenger with a letter from Marsham. It contained arguments and protestations which in the living mouth might have had some power. That the living mouth was not there to make them was a fact more eloquent than any letter. For the first time Diana was conscious of impatience, of a natural indignation. She merely asked the messenger to say that "there was no answer."

Yet, as they crossed London her heart fluttered within her. One moment her eyes were at the window scanning the bustle of the streets; the next she would force herself to talk and smile with Muriel Colwood.

Mrs. Colwood insisted on dinner at the Charing Cross Hotel. Diana submitted. Afterward they made their way, along the departure platform, to the Dover-Calais train. They took their seats. Muriel Colwood knew—felt it indeed, through every nerve—that the girl with her was still watching, still hoping, still straining each bodily perception in a listening expectancy.

The train was very full, and the platform crowded with friends, luggage, and officials. Upon the tumult the great electric lamps threw their cold ugly light. The roar and whistling of the trains filled the vast station. Diana, meanwhile, sat motionless in her corner, looking out, one hand propping her face.

But no one came. The signal was given for departure. The train glided out. Diana's head slipped back and her eyes closed. Muriel, stifling her tears, dared not approach her.

Northward and eastward from Dover Harbor, sweep beyond sweep, rose the white cliffs that are to the arriving and departing Englishman the symbols of his country.

Diana, on deck, wrapped in veil and cloak, watched them disappear, in mists already touched by the moonrise. Six months before she had seen them for the first time, had fed her eyes upon the "dear, dear land," as cliffs and fields and houses flashed upon the sight, yearning toward it with the passion of a daughter and an exile.

In those six months she had lived out the first chapter of her youth. She stood between two shores of life, like the vessel from which she gazed; vanishing lights and shapes behind her; darkness in front.

> "Where lies the land to which the ship must go?
> Far, far ahead is all the seamen know!"

Part III

"Love's eye is not so true as all men's: no,
How can it? O how can Love's eye be true
That is so vexed with watching and with tears?"

CHAPTER XV

LONDON was in full season. But it was a cold May, and both the town and its inhabitants wore a gray and pinched aspect. Under the east wind an unsavory dust blew along Piccadilly; the ladies were still in furs; the trees were venturing out reluctantly, showing many a young leaf bitten by night frosts; the Park had but a scanty crowd; and the drapers, oppressed with summer goods, saw their muslins and gauzes in the windows give up their freshness for naught.

Nevertheless, the ferment of political and social life had seldom been greater. A Royal wedding in the near future was supposed to account for the vigor of London's social pulse; the streets, indeed, were already putting up poles and decorations. And a general election, expected in the autumn, if not before, accounted for the vivacity of the clubs, the heat of the newspapers, and the energy of the House of Commons, where all-night sittings were lightly risked by the Government and recklessly challenged by the Opposition. Everybody was playing to the gallery—*i.e.*, the country. Old members were wooing their constituencies afresh; young candidates were spending feverish energies on new hazards, and anxiously inquiring at what particular date in the campaign tea-parties became unlawful. Great issues were at stake; for old parties were breaking up under the pressure of new interests and passions; within the Liberal party the bub-

bling of new faiths was at its crudest and hottest; and those who stood by the slow and safe ripening of Freedom, from "precedent to precedent," were in much anxiety as to what shape or shapes might ultimately emerge from a brew so strong and heady. Which only means that now, as always, Whigs and Radicals were at odds; and the "unauthorized programme" of the day was sending its fiery cross through the towns and the industrial districts of the north.

A debate of some importance was going on in the House of Commons. The Tory Government had brought in a Land Bill, intended, no doubt, rather as bait for electors than practical politics. It was timid and ill-drafted, and the Opposition, in days when there were still some chances in debate, joyously meant to kill it, either by frontal attack or by obstruction. But, in the opinion of the Left Wing of the party, the chief weapon of its killing should be the promise of a much larger and more revolutionary measure from the Liberal side. The powerful Right Wing, however, largely represented on the front bench, held that you could no more make farmers than saints by Act of Parliament, and that only by slow and indirect methods could the people be drawn back to the land. There was, in fact, little difference between them and the front bench opposite, except a difference in method; only the Whig brains were the keener; and in John Ferrier the Right Wing had a personality and an oratorical gift which the whole Tory party admired and envied.

There had been a party meeting on the subject of the Bill, and Ferrier and the front bench had, on the whole, carried the indorsement of their policy. But there was

an active and discontented minority, full of rebellious projects for the general election.

On this particular afternoon Ferrier had been dealing with the Government Bill on the lines laid down by the meeting at Grenville House. His large pale face (the face of a student rather than a politician), with its small eyes and overhanging brows; the straight hair and massive head; the heavy figure closely buttoned in the familiar frock-coat; the gesture easy, animated, still young—on these well-known aspects a crowded House had bent its undivided attention. Then Ferrier sat down; a bore rose; and out flowed the escaping tide to the lobbies and the Terrace.

Marsham found himself on the Terrace, among a group of malcontents: Barton, grim and unkempt, prophet-eyes blazing, mouth contemptuous; the Scotchman McEwart, who had been one of the New Year's visitors to Tallyn, tall, wiry, red-haired, the embodiment of all things shrewd and efficient; and two or three more. A young London member was holding forth, masking what was really a passion of disgust in a slangy nonchalance.

"What's the good of turning these fellows out—will anybody tell me?—if that's all Ferrier can do for us? Think I prefer 'em to that kind of mush! As for Barton, I've had to hold him down by the coat-tails!"

Barton allowed the slightest glint of a smile to show itself for an instant. The speaker—Roland Lankester—was one of his few weaknesses. But the frown returned. He strolled along with his hands in his pockets and his eyes on the ground; his silence was the silence of one in whom the fire was hot.

"Most disappointing — all through!" said McEwart,

with emphasis. "The facts wrongly chosen—the argument absurd. It 'll take all the heart out of our fellows in the country."

Marsham looked up.

"Well, it isn't for want of pressure. Ferrier's life hasn't been worth living this last month."

The tone was ambiguous. It fitted either with defence or indictment.

The London member—Roland Lankester, who was a friend of Marion Vincent, and of Frobisher, represented an East End constituency, and lived there—looked at the speaker with a laugh. "That's perfectly true. What have we all been doing but 'gingering' Ferrier for the last six months? And here's the result! No earthly good in wearing one's self to fiddle-strings over this election! I shall go and keep pigs in Canada!"

The group strolled along the Terrace, leaving behind them an animated crowd, all busy with the same subject. In the middle of it they passed Ferrier himself—flushed—with the puffy eyes of a man who never gets more than a quarter allowance of sleep; his aspect, nevertheless, smiling and defiant, and a crowd of friends round him. The wind blew chill up the river, crisping the incoming tide; and the few ladies who were being entertained at tea drew their furs about them, shivering.

"He'll *have* to go to the Lords!—that's flat—if we win this election. If we come back, the new members will never stand him; and if we don't—well, I suppose, in that case, he does as well as anybody else."

The remarks were McEwart's. Lankester turned a sarcastic eye upon him.

"Don't you be unjust, my boy. Ferrier's one of the

smartest Parliamentary hands England has ever turned out."

At this Barton roused.

"What's the good of that?" he asked, with quiet ferocity, in his strong Lancashire accent. "What does Ferrier's smartness matter to us? The Labor men are sick of it! All he's asked to do is to run *straight!*—as the party wants him to run."

"All right. *Ad leones!* Ferrier to the Lords. I'm agreeable. Only I don't know what Marsham will say to it."

Lankester pushed back a very shabby pot-hat to a still more rakish angle, buttoning up an equally shabby coat the while against the east wind. He was a tall fair-haired fellow, half a Dane in race and aspect: broad-shouldered, loose-limbed, with a Franciscan passion for poverty and the poor. But a certain humorous tolerance for all sorts and conditions of men, together with certain spiritual gifts, made him friends in all camps. Bishops consulted him, the Socialists claimed him; perhaps it was the East End children who possessed him most wholly. Nevertheless, there was a fierce strain in him; he could be a fanatic, even a hard fanatic, on occasion.

Marsham did not show much readiness to take up the reference to himself. As he walked beside the others, his slender elegance, his handsome head, and fashionable clothes marked him out from the rugged force of Barton, the middle-class alertness of McEwart, the rubbed apostolicity of Lankester. But the face was fretful and worried.

"Ferrier has not the smallest intention of going to the Lords!" he said, at last—not without a touch of impatience.

"That's the party's affair."

"The party owes him a deal too much to insist upon anything against his will."

"Does it!—*does* it!" said Lankester. "Ferrier always reminds me of a cat we possessed at home, who brought forth many kittens. She loved them dearly, and licked them all over—tenderly—all day. But by the end of the second day they were always dead. Somehow she had killed them all. That's what Ferrier does with all our little Radical measures—loves 'em all—and kills 'em all."

McEwart flushed.

"Well, it's no good talking," he said, doggedly; "we've done enough of that! There will be a meeting of the Forward Club next week, and we shall decide on our line of action."

"Broadstone will never throw him over." Lankester threw another glance at Marsham. "You'll only waste your breath."

Lord Broadstone was the veteran leader of the party, who in the event of victory at the polls would undoubtedly be Prime Minister.

"He can take Foreign Affairs, and go to the Lords in a blaze of glory," said McEwart. "But he's *impossible!* —as leader in the Commons. The party wants grit—not dialectic."

Marsham still said nothing. The others fell to discussing the situation in much detail, gradually elaborating what were, in truth, the first outlines of a serious campaign against Ferrier's leadership. Marsham listened, but took no active part in it. It was plain, however, that none of the group felt himself in any way checked by Marsham's presence or silence.

Presently Marsham—the debate in the House having fallen to levels of dulness "measureless to man"—remembered that his mother had expressed a wish that he might come home to dinner. He left the House, lengthening his walk for exercise, by way of Whitehall and Piccadilly. His expression was still worried and preoccupied. Mechanically he stopped to look into a picture-dealer's shop, still open, somewhere about the middle of Piccadilly. A picture he saw there made him start. It was a drawing of the chestnut woods of Vallombrosa, in the first flush and glitter of spring, with a corner of one of the monastic buildings, now used as a hotel.

She was there. At an official crush the night before he had heard Chide say to Lady Niton that Miss Mallory had written to him from Vallombrosa, and was hoping to stay there till the end of June. So that she was sitting, walking, reading, among those woods. In what mood?—with what courage? In any case, she was alone; fighting her grief alone; looking forward to the future alone. Except, of course, for Mrs. Colwood—nice, devoted little thing!

He moved on, consumed with regrets and discomfort. During the two months which had elapsed since Diana had left England, he had, in his own opinion, gone through a good deal. He was pursued by the memory of that wretched afternoon when he had debated with himself whether he should not, after all, go and intercept her at Charing Cross, plead his mother's age and frail health, implore her to give him time; not to break off all relations; to revert, at least, to the old friendship. He had actually risen from his seat in the House of Commons half an hour before the starting of the train; had made his way to the Central Lobby, torn by in-

decision; and had there been pounced upon by an important and fussy constituent Of course, he could have shaken the man off. But just the extra resolution required to do it had seemed absolutely beyond his power, and when next he looked at the clock it was too late. He went back to the House, haunted by the imagination of a face. She would never have mentioned her route unless she had meant "Come and say good-bye!"—unless she had longed for a parting look and word. And he—coward that he was—had shirked it—had denied her last mute petition.

Well!—after all — might it not simply have made matters worse?—for her no less than for him? The whole thing was his mother's responsibility. He might, no doubt, have pushed it all through, regardless of consequences; he might have accepted the Juliet Sparling heritage, thrown over his career, braved his mother, and carried off Diana by storm—if, that is, she would ever have allowed him to make the sacrifice as soon as she fully understood it. But it would have been one of the most quixotic things ever done. He had made his effort to do it; and—frankly—he had not been capable of it. He wondered how many men of his acquaintance would have been capable of it.

Nevertheless, he had fallen seriously in his own estimation. Nor was he unaware that he had lost a certain amount of consideration with the world at large. His courtship of Diana had been watched by a great many people: and at the same moment that it came to an end and she left England, the story of her parentage had become known in Brookshire. There had been a remarkable outburst of public sympathy and pity, testifying, no doubt, in a striking way, to the effect produced by the

girl's personality, even in those few months of residence. And the fact that she was not there, that only the empty house that she had furnished with so much girlish pleasure remained to bear its mute testimony to her grief, made feeling all the hotter. Brookshire beheld her as a charming and innocent victim, and, not being able to tell her so, found relief in blaming and mocking at the man who had not stood by her. For it appeared there was to be no engagement, although all Brookshire had expected it. Instead of it, came the announcement of the tragic truth, the girl's hurried departure, and the passionate feeling on her behalf of people like the Roughsedges, or her quondam critic, the Vicar.

Marsham, thereupon, had become conscious of a wind of unpopularity blowing through his constituency. Some of the nice women of the neighborhood, with whom he had been always hitherto a welcome and desired guest, had begun to neglect him; men who would never have dreamed of allowing their own sons to marry a girl in Diana's position, greeted him with a shade less consideration than usual; and the Liberal agent in the division had suddenly ceased to clamor for his attendance and speeches at rural meetings. There could be no question that by some means or other the story had got abroad —no doubt in a most inaccurate and unjust form—and was doing harm.

Reflections of this kind were passing through his mind as he crossed Hyde Park Corner on his way to Eaton Square. Opposite St. George's Hospital he suddenly became aware of Sir James Chide on the other side of the road. At sight of him, Marsham waved his hand, quickening his pace that he might come up with him. Sir James, seeing him, gave him a perfunctory

greeting, and suddenly turned aside to hail a hansom, into which he jumped, and was carried promptly out of sight.

Marsham was conscious of a sudden heat in the face. He had never yet been so sharply reminded of a changed relation. After Diana's departure he had himself written to Chide, defending his own share in the matter, speaking bitterly of the action taken by his mother and sister, and lamenting that Diana had not been willing to adopt the waiting and temporizing policy, which alone offered any hope of subduing his mother's opposition. Marsham declared—persuading himself, as he wrote, of the complete truth of the statement—that he had been quite willing to relinquish his father's inheritance for Diana's sake, and that it was her own action alone that had separated them. Sir James had rather coldly acknowledged the letter, with the remark that few words were best on a subject so painful; and since then there had been no intimacy between the two men. Marsham could only think with discomfort of the scene at Felton Park, when a man of passionate nature and romantic heart had allowed him access to the most sacred and tragic memories of his life. Sir James felt, he supposed, that he had been cheated out of his confidence—cheated out of his sympathy. Well!—it was unjust!

He reached Eaton Square in good time for dinner, and found his mother in the drawing-room.

"You look tired, Oliver," she said, as he kissed her.

"It's the east wind, I suppose—beastly day!"

Lady Lucy surveyed him, as he stood, moody and physically chilled, with his back to the fire.

"Was the debate interesting?"

"Ferrier made a very disappointing speech. All our fellows are getting restive."

Lady Lucy looked astonished.

"Surely they ought to trust his judgment! He has done so splendidly for the party."

Marsham shook his head.

"I wish you would use your influence," he said, slowly. "There is a regular revolt coming on. A large number of men on our side say they won't be led by him; that if we come in, he must go to the Lords."

Lady Lucy started.

"Oliver!" she said, indignantly, "you know it would break his heart!"

And before both minds there rose a vision of Ferrier's future, as he himself certainly conceived it. A triumphant election—the Liberals in office—himself, Chancellor of the Exchequer, and leader of the Commons—with the reversion of the Premiership whenever old Lord Broadstone should die or retire—this indeed had been Ferrier's working understanding with his party for years; years of strenuous labor, and on the whole of magnificent generalship. Deposition from the leadership of the Commons, with whatever compensations, could only mean to him, and to the world in general, the failure of his career.

"They would give him Foreign Affairs, of course," said Marsham, after a pause.

"Nothing that they could give him would make up!" said Lady Lucy, with energy. "You certainly, Oliver, could not lend yourself to any intrigue of the kind."

Marsham shrugged his shoulders.

"My position is not exactly agreeable! I don't agree with Ferrier, and I do agree with the malcontents.

Moreover, when we come in, they will represent the strongest element in the party, with the future in their hands."

Lady Lucy looked at him with sparkling eyes.

"You can't desert him, Oliver!—not you!"

"Perhaps I'd better drop out of Parliament!" he said, impatiently. "The game sometimes doesn't seem worth the candle."

Lady Lucy—alarmed—laid a hand on his.

"Don't say those things, Oliver. You know you have never done so well as this year."

"Yes—up to two months ago."

His mother withdrew her hand. She perfectly understood. Oliver often allowed himself allusions of this kind, and the relations of mother and son were not thereby improved.

Silence reigned for a few minutes. With a hand that shook slightly, Lady Lucy drew toward her a small piece of knitting she had been occupied with when Marsham came in, and resumed it. Meanwhile there flashed through his mind one of those recollections that are only apparently incongruous. He was thinking of a dinner-party which his mother had given the night before; a vast dinner of twenty people; all well-fed, prosperous, moderately distinguished, and, in his opinion, less than moderately amused. The dinner had dragged; the guests had left early; and he had come back to the drawing-room after seeing off the last of them, stifled with yawns. Waste of food, waste of money, waste of time — waste of everything! He had suddenly been seized with a passionate sense of the dulness of his home life; with a wonder how long he could go on submitting to it. And as he recalled these feelings—as of

dust in the mouth—there struck across them an image from a dream-world. Diana sat at the head of the long table; Diana in white, with her slender neck, and the blue eyes, with their dear short-sighted look, her smile, and the masses of her dark hair. The dull faces on either side faded away; the lights, the flowers were for her—for her alone!

He roused himself with an effort. His mother was putting up her knitting, which, indeed, she had only pretended to work at.

"We must go and dress, Oliver. Oh! I forgot to tell you—Alicia arrived an hour ago."

"Ah!" He raised his eyebrows indifferently. "I hope she's well?"

"Brilliantly well—and as handsome as ever."

"Any love-affairs?"

"Several, apparently — but nothing suitable," said Lady Lucy, with a smile, as she rose and gathered together her possessions.

"It's time, I think, that Alicia made up her mind. She has been out a good while."

It gave him a curious pleasure—he could hardly tell why—to say this slighting thing of Alicia. After all, he had no evidence that she had done anything unfriendly or malicious at the time of the crisis. Instinctively, he had ranged her then and since as an enemy—as a person who had worked against him. But, in truth, he knew nothing for certain. Perhaps, after the foolish passages between them a year ago, it was natural that she should dislike and be critical of Diana. As to her coming now, it was completely indifferent to him. It would be a good thing, no doubt, for his mother to have her companionship.

As he opened the door for Lady Lucy to leave the room, he noticed her gray and fragile look.

"I believe you have had enough of London, mother. You ought to be getting abroad."

"I am all right," said Lady Lucy, hastily. "Like you, I hate east winds. Oliver, I have had a charming letter from Mr. Heath."

Mr. Heath had been for some months Marsham's local correspondent on the subject of the new Liberal hall in the county town. Lady Lucy had recently sent a check to the Committee, which had set all their building anxieties at rest.

Oliver looked down rather moodily upon her.

"It's pretty easy to write charming letters when people send you money. It would have been more to the purpose, I think, if they had taken a little trouble to raise some themselves!"

Lady Lucy flushed.

"I don't suppose Dunscombe is a place with many rich people in it," she said, in a voice of protest, as she passed him. Her thoughts hurt her as she mounted the stairs. Oliver had not received her gift—for, after all, it was a gift to him—very graciously. And the same might have been said of various other things that she had tried to do for him during the preceding months.

As to Marsham, while he dressed, he too recalled other checks that had been recently paid for him, other anxious attempts that had been made to please him. Since Diana had vanished from the scene, no complaisance, no liberality had been too much for his mother's good-will. He had never been so conscious of an atmosphere of money—much money. And there were moments—what he himself would have described

as morbid moments—when it seemed to him the price of blood; when he felt himself to be a mere, crude moral tale embodied and walking about. Yet how ridiculous! What reasonable man, knowing what money means, and the power of it, but must have flinched a little under such a test as had been offered to him? His flinching had been nothing final or damnable. It was Diana, who, in her ignorance of the world, had expected him to take the sacrifice as though it were nothing and meant nothing—as no honest man of the world, in fact, could have taken it.

When Marsham descended he found Alicia already in possession of the drawing-room. Her gown of a brilliant shade of blue put the room out of joint, and beside the startling effect of her hair, all the washed-out decoration and conventional ornament which it contained made a worse effect than usual. There was nothing conventional or effaced about Alicia. She had become steadily more emphatic, more triumphant, more self-confident.

"Well, what have you been doing with yourself?—nothing but politics?" The careless, provocative smile with which the words were accomplished roused a kind of instant antagonism in Marsham.

"Nothing—nothing, at least, worth anybody's remembering."

"You spoke at Dunscombe last week."

"I did."

"And you went to help Mr. Collins at the Sheffield bye-election."

"I did. I am very much flattered that you know so much about my movements."

"I always know everything that you are doing," said Alicia, quietly—"you, and Cousin Lucy."

"You have the advantage of me then"; his laugh was embarrassed, but not amicable; "for I am afraid I have no idea what you have been doing since Easter!"

"I have been at home, flirting with the Curate," said Alicia, with a laugh. As she sat, with her head thrown back against the chair, the light sparkling on her white skin, on her necklace of yellow topazes, and the jewelled fan in her hands, the folds of blue chiffon billowing round her, there could be no doubt of her effectiveness. Marsham could not help laughing, too.

"Charming for the Curate! Did he propose to you?"

"Certainly. I think we were engaged for twenty-four hours."

"That you might see what it was like? *Et après?*"

"He was afraid he had mistaken my character"

Marsham laughed out.

"Poor victim! May I ask what you did it for?"

He found himself looking at her with curiosity and a certain anger. To be engaged, even for twenty-four hours, means that you allow your betrothed the privileges of betrothal. And in the case of Alicia no man was likely to forego them. She was really a little too unscrupulous!

"What I did it for? He was so nice and good-looking!"

"And there was nobody else?"

"Nobody. Home was a desert."

"H'm!" said Marsham. "Is he broken-hearted?"

Alicia shrugged her shoulders a little.

"I don't think so. I write him such charming letters. It is all simmering down beautifully."

Marsham moved restlessly to and fro, first putting down a lamp, then fidgeting with an evening paper. Alicia never failed to stir in him the instinct of sex, in its combative and critical form; and hostile as he believed he was to her, her advent had certainly shaken him out of his depression.

She meanwhile watched him with her teasing eyes, apparently enjoying his disapproval.

"I know exactly what you are thinking," she said, presently.

"I doubt it."

"Heartless coquette!" she said, mimicking his voice. "Never mind—her turn will come presently!"

"You don't allow my thoughts much originality."

"Why should I? Confess!—you did think that?"

Her small white teeth flashed in the smile she gave him. There was an exuberance of life and spirits about her that was rather disarming. But he did not mean to be disarmed.

"I did not think anything of the kind," he said, returning to the fire and looking down upon her; "simply because I know you too well."

Alicia reddened a little. It was one of her attractions that she flushed so easily.

"Because you know me too well?" she repeated. "Let me see. That means that you don't believe my turn will ever come?"

Marsham smiled.

"Your turn for what?" he said, dryly.

"I think we are getting mixed up!" Her laugh was as musical as he remembered it. "Let's begin again. Ah! here comes Cousin Lucy!"

Lady Lucy entered, ushering in an elderly relation, a

Miss Falloden, dwelling also in Eaton Square: a comfortable lady with a comfortable income; a social stopper of chinks, moreover, kind and talkative; who was always welcome on occasions when life was not too strenuous or the company too critical. Marsham offered her his arm, and the little party made its way to the dining-room.

"Do you go back to the House, Oliver, to-night?" asked his mother, as the entrée went round.

He replied in the affirmative, and resumed his conversation with Alicia. She was teasing him on the subject of some of his Labor friends in the House of Commons. It appeared that she had made the Curate, who was a Christian Socialist, take her to a Labor Conference at Bristol, where all the leaders were present, and her account of the proceedings and the types was both amusing and malicious. It was the first time that Marsham had known her attempt any conversation of the kind, and he recognized that her cleverness was developing. But many of the remarks she made on persons well known to him annoyed him extremely, and he could not help trying to punish her for them. Alicia, however, was not easily punished. She evaded him with a mosquito-like quickness, returning to the charge as soon as he imagined himself to have scored with an irrelevance or an absurdity which would have been exasperating in a man, but had somehow to be answered and politely handled from a woman. He lost his footing continually; and as she had none to lose, she had, on the whole, the best of it.

Then—in the very midst of it—he remembered, with a pang, another skirmish, another battle of words—with

"ALICIA, UPRIGHT IN HER CORNER—OLIVER, DEEP IN HIS ARM-CHAIR"

another adversary, in a different scene. The thrill of that moment in the Tallyn drawing-room, when he had felt himself Diana's conqueror; delighting in her rosy surrender, which was the mere sweet admission of a girl's limitations; and in its implied appeal, timid and yet proud, to a victor who was also a friend—all this he was conscious of, by association, while the sparring with Alicia still went on. His tongue moved under the stimulus of hers; but in the background of the mind rose the images and sensations of the past.

Lady Lucy, meanwhile, looked on, well pleased. She had not seen Oliver so cheerful, or so much inclined to talk, since "that unfortunate affair," and she was proportionately grateful to Alicia.

Marsham returned to the drawing-room with the ladies, declaring that he must be off in twenty minutes. Alicia settled herself in a corner of the sofa, and played with Lady Lucy's dog. Marsham endeavored, for a little, to do his duty by Miss Falloden; but in a few minutes he had drifted back to Alicia. This time she made him talk of Parliament, and the two or three measures in which he was particularly interested. She showed, indeed, a rather astonishing acquaintance with the details of those measures, and the thought crossed Marsham's mind: "Has she been getting them up?—and why?" But the idea did not make the conversation she offered him any the less pleasant. Quite the contrary. The mixture of teasing and deference which she showed him, in the course of it, had been the secret of her old hold upon him. She reasserted something of it now, and he was not unwilling. During the morose and taciturn phase through which he had been passing there had been no opportunity or desire to talk of himself,

especially to a woman. But Alicia had always made him talk of himself, and he had forgotten how agreeable it might be.

He threw himself down beside her, and the time passed. Lady Lucy and Miss Falloden had retired into the back drawing-room, where the one knitted and the other gossiped. But as the clock struck a quarter to eleven Lady Lucy called, in some astonishment: "So you are not going back to the House, Oliver?"

He sprang to his feet.

"Heavens!" He looked at the clock, irresolute. "Well, there's nothing much on, mother. I don't think I need."

And he subsided again into his chair beside Alicia.

Miss Falloden looked at Lady Lucy with a meaning smile.

"I didn't know they were such friends!" she said, under her breath.

Lady Lucy made no reply. But her eyes travelled through the archway dividing the two rooms to the distant figures framed within it—Alicia, upright in her corner, the red gold of her hair shining against the background of a white azalea; Oliver, deep in his arm-chair, his long legs crossed, his hands gesticulating.

Lady Niton's sarcasms recurred to her. She was not sure whether she welcomed or disliked the idea. But, after all, why not?

CHAPTER XVI

"ECCO, Signorina! il Convento!"

The driver reined up his horse, pointing with his whip.

Diana and Muriel Colwood stood up eagerly in the carriage, and there at the end of the long white road, blazing on the mountain-side, terrace upon terrace, arch upon arch, rose the majestic pile of buildings which bears the name of St. Francis. Nothing else from this point was to be seen of Assisi. The sun, descending over the mountain of Orvieto, flooded the building itself with a level and blinding light, while upon Monte Subasio, behind, a vast thunder-cloud, towering in the southern sky, threw storm-shadows, darkly purple, across the mountain-side, and from their bosom the monastery, the churches, and those huge substructures which make the platform on which the convent stands, shone out in startling splendor.

The travellers gazed their fill, and the carriage clattered on.

As they neared the town and began to climb the hill Diana looked round her—at the plain through which they had come, at the mountains to the east, at the dome of the Portiuncula. Under the rushing light and shade of the storm-clouds, the blues of the hills, the young green of the vines, the silver of the olives, rose and faded, as it were, in waves of color, impetuous and magnificent.

Only the great golden building, crowned by its double church, most famous of all the shrines of Italy, glowed steadily, amid the alternating gleam and gloom—fit guardian of that still living and burning memory which is St. Francis.

"We shall be happy here, sha'n't we?" said Diana, stealing a hand into her companion's. "And we needn't hurry away."

She drew a long breath. Muriel looked at her tenderly—enchanted whenever the old enthusiasm, the old buoyancy reappeared. They had now been in Italy for nearly two months. Muriel knew that for her companion the time had passed in one long wrestle for a new moral and spiritual standing-ground. All the glory of Italy had passed before the girl's troubled eyes as something beautiful but incoherent, a dream landscape, on which only now and then her full consciousness laid hold. For to the intenser feeling of youth, full reality belongs only to the world within; the world where the heart loves and suffers. Diana's true life was there; and she did not even admit the loyal and gentle woman who had taken a sister's place beside her to a knowledge of its ebb and flow. She bore herself cheerfully and simply; went to picture-galleries and churches; sketched and read—making no parade either of sorrow or of endurance. But the impression on Mrs. Colwood all the time was of a desperately struggling soul voyaging strange seas of grief alone. She sometimes — though rarely — talked with Muriel of her mother's case; she would sometimes bring her friend a letter of her father's, or a fragment of journal from that full and tragic store which the solicitors had now placed in her hands; generally escaping afterward from all comment; only able to bear a look, a pressure of

the hand. But, as a rule, she kept her pain out of sight. In the long dumb debate with herself she had grown thin and pale. There was nothing, however, to be done, nothing to be said. The devoted friend could only watch and wait. Meanwhile, of Oliver Marsham not a word was ever spoken between them.

The travellers climbed the hill as the sun sank behind the mountains, made for the Subasio Hotel, found letters, and ordered rooms.

Among her letters, Diana opened one from Sir James Chide. "The House will be up on Thursday for the recess, and at last I have persuaded Ferrier to let me carry him off. He is looking worn out, and, as I tell him, will break down before the election unless he takes a holiday now. So he comes — protesting. We shall probably join you somewhere in Umbria—at Perugia or Assisi. If I don't find you at one or the other, I shall write to Siena, where you said you meant to be by the first week in June. And, by-the-way, I shouldn't wonder if Bobbie Forbes were with us. He amuses Ferrier, who is very fond of him. But, of course, you needn't see anything of him unless you like."

The letter was passed on to Muriel, who thought she perceived that the news it contained seemed to make Diana shrink into herself. She was much attached to Sir James Chide, and had evidently felt pleasure in the expectation of his coming out to join them. But Mr. Ferrier—and Bobbie Forbes—both of them associated with the Marshams and Tallyn? Mrs. Colwood noticed the look of effort in the girl's delicate face, and wished that Sir James had been inspired to come alone.

After unpacking, there still remained half an hour

before dark. They hurried out for a first look at the double church.

The evening was cold and the wind chill. Spring comes tardily to the high mountain town, and a light powdering of snow still lay on the topmost slope of Monte Subasio. Before going into the church they turned up the street that leads to the Duomo and the temple of Minerva. Assisi seemed deserted—a city of ghosts. Not a soul in the street, not a light in the windows. On either hand, houses built of a marvellous red stone or marble, which seemed still to hold and radiate the tempestuous light which had but just faded from them; the houses of a small provincial aristocracy, immemorially old like the families which still possessed them; close-paned, rough-hewn, and poor—yet showing here and there a doorway, a balcony, a shrine, touched with divine beauty.

"Where *are* all the people gone to?" cried Muriel, looking at the secret rose-colored walls, now withdrawing into the dusk, and at the empty street. "Not a soul anywhere!"

Presently they came to an open doorway—above it an inscription—"Bibliotheca dei Studii Franciscani." Everything stood open to the passer-by. They went in timidly, groped their way to the marble stairs, and mounted. All void and tenantless! At the top of the stairs was a library with dim bookcases and marble floors and busts; but no custode—no reader—not a sound!

"We seem to be all alone here—with St. Francis!" said Diana, softly, as they descended to the street—"or is everybody at church?"

They turned their steps back to the Lower Church. As they went in, darkness—darkness sudden and pro-

found engulfed them. They groped their way along the outer vestibule or transept, finding themselves amid a slowly moving crowd of peasants. The crowd turned; they with it; and a blaze of light burst upon them.

Before them was the nave of the Lower Church, with its dark-storied chapels on either hand, itself bathed in a golden twilight, with figures of peasants and friars walking in it, vaguely transfigured. But the sanctuary beyond, the altar, the walls, and low-groined roof flamed and burned. An exposition of the Sacrament was going on. Hundreds of slender candles arranged upon and about the altar in a blazing pyramid drew from the habitual darkness in which they hide themselves Giotto's thrice famous frescos; or quickened on the walls, like flowers gleaming in the dawn, the loveliness of quiet faces, angel and saint and mother, the beauty of draped folds at their simplest and broadest, a fairy magic of wings and trumpets, of halos and crowns.

Now the two strangers understood why they had found Assisi itself deserted; emptied of its folk this quiet eve. Assisi was here, in the church which is at once the home and daily spectacle of her people. Why stay away among the dull streets and small houses of the hill-side, when there were these pleasures of eye and ear, this sensuous medley of light and color, this fellowship and society, this dramatic symbolism and movement, waiting for them below, in the church of their fathers?

So that all were here, old and young, children and youths, fathers just home from their work, mothers with their babies, girls with their sweethearts. Their happy yet reverent familiarity with the old church, their gay and natural participation in the ceremony that was going on, made on Diana's alien mind the effect of a great

multitude crowding to salute their King. There, in the midst, surrounded by kneeling acolytes and bending priests, shone the Mystic Presence. Each man and woman and child, as they passed out of the shadow into the light, bent the knee, then parted to either side, each to his own place, like courtiers well used to the ways of a beautiful and familiar pageantry.

An old peasant in a blouse noticed the English ladies, beckoned to them, and with a kind of gracious authority led them through dark chapels, till he had placed them in the open space that spread round the flaming altar, and found them seats on the stone ledge that girdles the walls. An old woman saying her beads looked up smiling and made room. A baby or two ran out over the worn marble flags, gazed up at the gilt-and-silver angels hovering among the candles of the altar, and was there softly captured—wide-eyed, and laughing in a quiet ecstasy—by its watchful mother.

Diana sat down, bewildered by the sheer beauty of a marvellous and incomparable sight. Above her head shone the Giotto frescos, the immortal four, in which the noblest legend of Catholicism finds its loveliest expression, as it were the script, itself imperishable, of a dying language, to which mankind will soon have lost the key.

Yet only dying, perhaps, as the tongue of Cicero died —to give birth to the new languages of Europe.

For in Diana's heart this new language of the spirit which is the child of the old was already strong, speaking through the vague feelings and emotions which held her spellbound. What matter the garment of dogma and story?—the raiment of pleaded fact, which for the modern is no fact? In Diana, as in hundreds and thou-

sands of her fellows, it had become — unconsciously— without the torment and struggle of an older generation — Poetry and Idea; and all the more invincible thereby.

Above her head, Poverty, gaunt and terrible in her white robe, her skirt torn with brambles, and her poor cheek defaced by the great iron hook which formerly upheld the Sanctuary lamp, married with St. Francis— Christ himself joining their hands.

So Love and Sorrow pledged each other in the gleaming color of the roof. Divine Love spoke from the altar, and in the crypt beneath their feet which held the tomb of the Poverello the ashes of Love slept.

The girl's desolate heart melted within her. In these weeks of groping, religion had not meant much to her. It had been like a bird-voice which night silences. All the energy of her life had gone into endurance. But now it was as though her soul plunged into the freshness of vast waters, which upheld and sustained—without effort. Amid the shadows and phantasms of the church—between the faces on the walls and the kneeling peasants, both equally significant and alive—those ghosts of her own heart that moved with her perpetually in the life of memory stood, or knelt, or gazed, with the rest: the piteous figure of her mother; her father's gray hair and faltering step; Oliver's tall youth. Never would she escape them any more; they were to be the comrades of her life, for Nature had given her no powers of forgetting. But here, in the shrine of St. Francis, it was as though the worst smart of her anguish dropped from her. From the dark splendor, the storied beauty of the church, voices of compassion and of peace spoke to her pain; the waves of feeling bore her on, unresisting; she closed her

eyes against the lights, holding back the tears. Life seemed suspended, and suffering ceased.

"So we have tracked you!" whispered a voice in her ear. She looked up startled. Three English travellers had quietly made their way to the back of the altar. Sir James Chide stood beside her; and behind him the substantial form of Mr. Ferrier, with the merry snub-nosed face of Bobbie Forbes smiling over the great man's shoulder.

Diana — smiling back — put a finger to her lip; the service was at its height, and close as they were to the altar decorum was necessary. Presently, guided by her, they moved softly on to a remoter and darker corner.

"Couldn't we escape to the Upper Church?" asked Chide of Diana.

She nodded, and led the way. They stole in and out of the kneeling groups of the north transept, and were soon climbing the stairway that links the two churches, out of sight and hearing of the multitude below. Here there was again pale daylight. Greetings were interchanged, and both Chide and Ferrier studied Diana's looks with a friendly anxiety they did their best to conceal. Forbes also observed Juliet Sparling's daughter—hotly curious—yet also hotly sympathetic. What a story, by Jove!

Their footsteps echoed in the vast emptiness of the Upper Church. Apparently they had it to themselves.

"No friars!" said Forbes, looking about him. "That's a blessing, anyway! You can't deny, Miss Mallory, that *they*'re a blot on the landscape. Or have you been flattering them up, as all the other ladies do who come here?"

"We have only just arrived. What's wrong with the friars?" smiled Diana.

"Well, we arrived this morning, and I've about taken their measure—though Ferrier won't allow it. But I saw four of them—great lazy, loafing fellows, Miss Mallory—much stronger than you or me—being dragged up these abominable hills—*four of 'em*—in one *legno*—with one wretched toast-rack of a horse. And not one of them thought of walking. Each of them with his brown petticoats, and an umbrella as big as himself. Ugh! I offered to push behind, and they glared at me. What do you think St. Francis would have said to them? Kicked them out of that *legno*, pretty quick, I'll bet you!"

Diana surveyed the typical young Englishman indulging a typically Protestant mood.

"I thought there were only a few old men left," she said, "and that it was all very sad and poetic?"

"That used to be so," said Ferrier, glancing round the church, so as to make sure that Chide was safely occupied in seeing as much of the Giotto frescos on the walls as the fading light allowed. "Then the Pope won a lawsuit. The convent is now the property of the Holy See, the monastery has been revived, and the place seems to swarm with young monks. However, it is you ladies that ruin them. You make pretty speeches to them, and look so charmingly devout."

"There was a fellow at San Damiano this morning," interrupted Bobbie, indignantly; "awfully good-looking—and the most affected cad I ever beheld. I'd like to have been his fag-master at Eton! I saw him making eyes at some American girls as we came in; then he came posing and sidling up to us, and gave us a little lecture on

'Ateismo.' Ferrier said nothing—stood there as meek as a lamb, listening to him—looking straight at him. I nearly died of laughing behind them."

"Come here, Bobbie, you reprobate!" cried Chide from a distance. "Hold your tongue, and bring me the guide-book."

Bobbie strolled off, laughing.

"Is it all a sham, then," said Diana, looking round her with a smile and a sigh: "St. Francis — and the 'Fioretti'—and the 'Hymn to the Sun'? Has it all ended in lazy monks—and hypocrisy?"

"Dante asked himself the same question eighty years after St. Francis's death. Yet here is this divine church!"—Ferrier pointed to the frescoed walls, the marvellous roof—"here is immortal art!—and here, in your mind and in mine, after six hundred years, is a memory—an emotion—which, but for St. Francis, had never been; by which indeed we judge his degenerate sons. Is that not achievement enough—for one child of man?"

"Six hundred years hence what modern will be as much alive as St. Francis is now?" Diana wondered, as they strolled on.

He turned a quiet gaze upon her.

"Darwin? At least I throw it out."

"Darwin!" Her voice showed doubt — the natural demur of her young ignorance and idealism.

"Why not? What faith was to the thirteenth century knowledge is to us. St. Francis rekindled the heart of Europe, Darwin has transformed the main conception of the human mind."

In the dark she caught the cheerful patience of the small penetrating eyes as they turned upon her. And at the same time—strangely—she became aware of a sudden

and painful impression; as though, through and behind the patience, she perceived an immense fatigue and discouragement—an ebbing power of life—in the man beside her.

"Hullo!" said Bobbie Forbes, turning back toward them, "I thought there was no one else here."

For suddenly they had become aware of a tapping sound on the marble floor, and from the shadows of the eastern end there emerged two figures: a woman in front, lame and walking with a stick, and a man behind. The cold reflected light which filled the western half of the church shone full on both faces. Bobbie Forbes and Diana exclaimed, simultaneously. Then Diana sped along the pavement.

"Who?" said Chide, rejoining the other two.

"Frobisher—and Miss Vincent," said Forbes, studying the new-comers.

"Miss Vincent!" Chide's voice showed his astonishment. "I thought she had been very ill."

"So she has," said Ferrier—"very ill. It is amazing to see her here."

"And Frobisher?"

Ferrier made no reply. Chide's expression showed perplexity, perhaps a shade of coldness. In him a warm Irish heart was joined with great strictness, even prudishness of manners, the result of an Irish Catholic education of the old type. Young women, in his opinion, could hardly be too careful, in a calumnious world. The modern flouting of old decorums—small or great—found no supporter in the man who had passionately defended and absolved Juliet Sparling.

But he followed the rest to the greeting of the new-comers. Diana's hand was in Miss Vincent's, and the

girl's face was full of joy; Marion Vincent, deathly white, her eyes, more amazing, more alive than ever, amid the emaciation that surrounded them, greeted the party with smiling composure—neither embarrassed, nor apologetic—appealing to Frobisher now and then as to her travelling companion—speaking of "our week at Orvieto"—making, in fact, no secret of an arrangement which presently every member of the group about her—even Sir James Chide—accepted as simply as it was offered to them.

As to Frobisher, he was rather silent, but no more embarrassed than she. It was evident that he kept an anxious watch lest her stick should slip upon the marble floor, and presently he insisted in a low voice that she should go home and rest.

"Come back after dinner," she said to him, in the same tone as they emerged on the piazza. He nodded, and hurried off by himself.

"You are at the Subasio?" The speaker turned to Diana. "So am I. I don't dine—but shall we meet afterward?"

"And Mr. Frobisher?" said Diana, timidly.

"He is staying at the Leone. But I told him to come back."

After dinner the whole party met in Diana's little sitting-room, of which one window looked to the convent, while the other commanded the plain. And from the second, the tenant of the room had access to a small terrace, public, indeed, to the rest of the hotel, but as there were no other guests the English party took possession.

Bobbie stood beside the terrace window with Diana, gossiping. while Chide and Ferrier paced the terrace

with their cigars. Neither Miss Vincent nor Frobisher had yet appeared, and Muriel Colwood was making tea. Bobbie was playing his usual part of the chatterbox, while at the same time he was inwardly applying much native shrewdness and a boundless curiosity to Diana and her affairs.

Did she know—had she any idea—that in London at that moment she was one of the main topics of conversation?—in fact, the best talked-about young woman of the day?—that if she were to spend June in town—which of course she would not do—she would find herself a *succès fou*—people tumbling over one another to invite her, and make a show of her? Everybody of his acquaintance was now engaged in retrying the Wing murder, since that statement of Chide's in the *Times*. No one talked of anything else, and the new story that was now tacked on to the old had given yet another spin to the ball of gossip.

How had the story got out? Bobbie believed that it had been mainly the doing of Lady Niton. At any rate, the world understood perfectly that Juliet Sparling's innocent and unfortunate daughter had been harshly treated by Lady Lucy—and deserted by Lady Lucy's son.

Queer fellow, Marsham!—rather a fool, too. Why the deuce didn't he stick to it? Lady Lucy would have come round; he would have gained enormous *kudos*, and lost nothing. Bobbie looked admiringly at his companion, vowing to himself that she was worth fighting for. But his own heart was proof. For three months he had been engaged, *sub rosa*, to a penniless cousin. No one knew, least of all Lady Niton, who, in spite of her championship of Diana, would probably be furious

when she did know. He found himself pining to tell Diana; he would tell her as soon as ever he got an opportunity. Odd! — that the effect of having gone through a lot yourself should be that other people were strongly drawn to unload their troubles upon you. Bobbie felt himself a selfish beast; but all the same his "Ettie" and his debts; the pros and cons of the various schemes for his future, in which he had hitherto allowed Lady Niton to play so queer and tyrannical a part—all these burned on his tongue till he could confide them to Diana.

Meanwhile the talk strayed to Ferrier and politics—dangerous ground! Yet some secret impulse in Diana drew her toward it, and Bobbie's curiosity played up. Diana spoke with concern of the great man's pallor and fatigue. "Not to be wondered at," said Forbes, "considering the tight place he was in, or would soon be in." Diana asked for explanations, acting a part a little; for since her acquaintance with Oliver Marsham she had become a diligent reader of newspapers. Bobbie, divining her, gave her the latest and most authentic gossip of the clubs; as to the various incidents and gradations of the now open revolt of the Left Wing; the current estimates of Ferrier's strength in the country; and the prospects of the coming election.

Presently he even ventured on Marsham's name, feeling instinctively that she waited for it. If there was any change in the face beside him the May darkness concealed it, and Bobbie chattered on. There was no doubt that Marsham was in a difficulty. All his sympathies at least were with the rebels, and their victory would be his profit.

"Yet as every one knows that Marsham is under great

obligations to Ferrier, for him to join the conspiracy these fellows are hatching doesn't look pretty."

"He won't join it!" said Diana, sharply.

"Well, a good many people think he's in it already. Oh, I dare say it's all rot!" the speaker added, hastily; "and, besides, it's not at all certain that Marsham himself will get in next time."

"Get in!" It was a cry of astonishment—passing on into constraint. "I thought Mr. Marsham's seat was absolutely safe."

"Not it." Bobbie began to flounder. "The fact is it's not safe at all; it's uncommonly shaky. He'll have a squeak for it. They're not so sweet on him down there as they used to be."

Gracious!—if she were to ask why! The young man was about hastily to change the subject when Sir James and his companion came toward them.

"Can't we tempt you out, Miss Mallory?" said Ferrier. "There is a marvellous change!" He pointed to the plain over which the night was falling. "When we met you in the church it was still winter, or wintry spring. Now—in two hours—the summer's come!"

And on Diana's face, as she stepped out to join him, struck a buffet of warm air; a heavy scent of narcissus rose from the flower-boxes on the terrace; and from a garden far below came the sharp thin prelude of a nightingale.

For about half an hour the young girl and the veteran of politics walked up and down—sounding each other—heart reaching out to heart—dumbly—behind the veil of words. There was a secret link between them. The politician was bruised and weary—well aware that just

as Fortune seemed to have brought one of her topmost prizes within his grasp, forces and events were gathering in silence to contest it with him. Ferrier had been twenty-seven years in the House of Commons; his chief life was there, had always been there; outside that maimed and customary pleasure he found, besides, a woman now white-haired. To rule—to lead that House had been the ambition of his life. He had earned it; had scorned delights for it; and his powers were at their ripest.

Yet the intrigue, as he knew, was already launched that might, at the last moment, sweep him from his goal. Most of the men concerned in it he either held for honest fanatics or despised as flatterers of the mob—ignobly pliant. He could and would fight them all with good courage and fair hope of victory.

But Lucy Marsham's son!—that defection, realized or threatened, was beginning now to hit him hard. Amid all their disagreements of the past year his pride had always refused to believe that Marsham could ultimately make common cause with the party dissenters. Ferrier had hardly been able to bring himself, indeed, to take the disagreements seriously. There was a secret impatience, perhaps even a secret arrogance, in his feeling. A young man whom he had watched from his babyhood, had put into Parliament, and led and trained there!—that he should take this hostile and harassing line, with threat of worse, was a matter too sore and intimate to be talked about. He did not mean to talk about it. To Lady Lucy he never spoke of Oliver's opinions, except in a half-jesting way; to other people he did not speak of them at all. Ferrier's affections were deep and silent. He had not found it possible to love the mother without

loving the son—had played, indeed, a father's part to him since Henry Marsham's death. He knew the brilliant, flawed, unstable, attractive fellow through and through. But his knowledge left him still vulnerable. He thought little of Oliver's political capacity; and, for all his affection, had no great admiration for his character. Yet Oliver had power to cause him pain of a kind that no other of his Parliamentary associates possessed.

The letters of that morning had brought him news of an important meeting in Marsham's constituency, in which his leadership had been for the first time openly and vehemently attacked. Marsham had not been present at the meeting, and Lady Lucy had written, eagerly declaring that he could not have prevented it and had no responsibility. But could the thing have been done within his own borders without, at least, a tacit connivance on his part?

The incident had awakened a peculiarly strong feeling in the elder man, because during the early days of the recess he had written a series of letters to Marsham on the disputed matters that were dividing the party; letters intended not only to recall Marsham's own allegiance, but—through him—to reach two of the leading dissidents — Lankester and Barton — in particular, for whom he felt a strong personal respect and regard.

These letters were now a cause of anxiety to him. His procedure in writing them had been, of course, entirely correct. It is the business of a party leader to persuade. But he had warned Oliver from the beginning that only portions of them could or should be used in the informal negotiations they were meant to help. Ferrier had always been incorrigibly frank in his talk or correspondence with Marsham, ever since the days when as

an Oxford undergraduate, bent on shining at the Union, Oliver had first shown an interest in politics, and had found in Ferrier, already in the front rank, the most stimulating of teachers. These remarkable letters accordingly contained a good deal of the caustic or humorous discussion of Parliamentary personalities, in which Ferrier—Ferrier at his ease—excelled; and many passages, besides, in connection with the measures desired by the Left Wing of the party, steeped in the political pessimism, whimsical or serious, in which Ferrier showed perhaps his most characteristic side at moments of leisure or intimacy; while the moods expressed in outbreaks of the kind had little or no effect on his pugnacity as a debater or his skill as a party strategist, in face of the enemy.

But, by George! if they were indiscreetly shown, or repeated, some of those things might blow up the party! Ferrier uncomfortably remembered one or two instances during the preceding year, in which it had occurred to him—as the merest fleeting impression—that Oliver had repeated a saying or had twisted an opinion of his unfairly—puzzling instances, in which, had it been any one else, Ferrier would have seen the desire to snatch a personal advantage at his, Ferrier's, expense. But how entertain such a notion in the case of Oliver! Ridiculous!

He would write no more letters, however. With the news of the Dunscombe meeting the relations between himself and Oliver entered upon a new phase. Toward Lucy's son he must bear himself—politically—henceforward, not as the intimate confiding friend or foster-father, but as the statesman with greater interests than his own to protect. This seemed to him clear; yet the

effort to adjust his mind to the new conditions gave him deep and positive pain.

But what, after all, were his grievances compared with those of this soft-eyed girl? It pricked his conscience to remember how feebly he had fought her battle. She must know that he had done little or nothing for her; yet there was something peculiarly gentle, one might have thought pitiful, in her manner toward him. His pride winced under it.

Sir James, too, must have his private talk with Diana —when he took her to the farther extremity of the little terrace, and told her of the results and echoes which had followed the publication, in the *Times*, of Wing's dying statement.

Diana had given her sanction to the publication with trembling and a torn mind. Justice to her mother required it. There she had no doubt; and her will, therefore, hardened to the act, and to the publicity which it involved. But Sir Francis Wing's son was still living, and what for her was piety must be for him stain and dishonor. She did not shrink; but the compunctions she could not show she felt; and, through Sir James Chide, she had written a little letter which had done something to soften the blow, as it affected a dull yet not inequitable mind.

"Does he forgive us?" she asked, in a low voice, turning her face toward the Umbrian plain, with its twinkling lights below, its stars above.

"He knows he must have done the same in our place," said Sir James.

After a minute he looked at her closely under the electric light which dominated the terrace.

"I am afraid you have been going through a great deal," he said, bending over her. "Put it from you when you can. You don't know how people feel for you."

She looked up with her quick smile.

"I don't always think of it—and oh! I am so thankful to *know!* I dream of them often—my father and mother—but not unhappily. They are *mine*—much, much more than they ever were."

She clasped her hands, and he felt rather than saw the exaltation, the tender fire in her look.

All very well! But this stage would pass—must pass. She had her own life to live. And if one man had behaved like a selfish coward, all the more reason to invoke, to hurry on the worthy and the perfect lover.

Presently Marion Vincent appeared, and with her Frobisher, and an unknown man with a magnificent brow, dark eyes of a remarkable vivacity, and a Southern eloquence both of speech and gesture. He proved to be a famous Italian, a poet well known to European fame, who, having married an English wife, had settled himself at Assisi for the study of St. Francis and the Franciscan literature. He became at once the centre of a circle which grouped itself on the terrace, while he pointed to spot after spot, dimly white on the shadows of the moonlit plain, linking each with the Franciscan legend and the passion of Franciscan poetry. The slopes of San Damiano, the sites of Spello, Bevagna, Cannara; Rivo Torto, the hovering dome of the Portiuncula, the desolate uplands that lead to the Carceri; one after another, the scenes and images—grotesque or lovely—simple or profound—of the vast Franciscan story rose into life under his touch, till they generated in those listening the answer of the

soul of to-day to the soul of the Poverello. Poverty, misery, and crime—still they haunt the Umbrian villages and the Assisan streets; the shadows of them, as the north knows them, lay deep and terrible in Marion Vincent's eyes. But as the poet spoke the eternal protest and battle-cry of Humanity swelled up against them—overflowed, engulfed them. The hearts of some of his listeners burned within them.

And finally he brought them back to the famous legend of the hidden church: deep, deep in the rock—below the two churches that we see to-day; where St. Francis waits—standing, with his arms raised to heaven, on fire with an eternal hope, an eternal ecstasy.

"Waits for what?" said Ferrier, under his breath, forgetting his audience a moment. "The death of Catholicism?"

Sir James Chide gave an uneasy cough. Ferrier, startled, looked round, threw his old friend a gesture of apology which Sir James mutely accepted. Then Sir James got up and strolled away, his hands in his pockets, toward the farther end of the terrace.

The poet meanwhile, ignorant of this little incident, and assuming the sympathy of his audience, raised his eyebrows, smiling, as he repeated Ferrier's words:

"The death of Catholicism! No, Signor!—its second birth." And with a Southern play of hand and feature—the nobility of brow and aspect turned now on this listener, now on that—he began to describe the revival of faith in Italy.

"Ten years ago there was not faith enough in this country to make a heresy! On the one side, a moribund organization, poisoned by a dead philosophy; on the other, negation, license, weariness—a dumb thirst for

men knew not what. And now!—if St. Francis were here—in every olive garden—in each hill town—on the roads and the by-ways—on the mountains—in the plains—his heart would greet the swelling of a new tide drawing inward to this land—the breath of a new spring kindling the buds of life. He would hear preached again, in the language of a new day, his own religion of love, humility, and poverty. The new faith springs from the very heart of Catholicism, banned and persecuted as new faiths have always been; but every day it lives, it spreads! Knowledge and science walk hand in hand with it; the future is before it. It spreads in tales and poems, like the Franciscan message; it penetrates the priesthood; it passes like the risen body of the Lord through the walls of seminaries and episcopal palaces; through the bulwarks that surround the Vatican itself. Tenderly, yet with an absolute courage, it puts aside old abuses, old ignorances!—like St. Francis, it holds out its hand to a spiritual bride—and the name of that bride is Truth! And in his grave within the rock—on tiptoe—the Poverello listens—the Poverello smiles!"

The poet raised his hand and pointed to the convent pile, towering under the moonlight. Diana's eyes filled with tears. Sir James had come back to the group, his face, with its dignified and strenuous lines, bent—half perplexed, half frowning—on the speaker. And the magic of the Umbrian night stole upon each quickened pulse.

But presently, when the group had broken up and Ferrier was once more strolling beside Diana, he said to her:

"A fine prophecy! But I had a letter this morning

from another Italian writer. It contains the following passage: 'The soul of this nation is dead. The old enthusiasms are gone. We have the most selfish, the most cynical *bourgeoisie* in Europe. Happy the men of 1860! They had some illusions left — religion, monarchy, country. We too have men who *would give themselves*—if they could. But to what? No one wants them any more—*nessuno li vuole piu!*' Well, there are the two. Which will you believe?"

"The poet!" said Diana, in a low faltering voice. But it was no cry of triumphant faith. It was the typical cry of our generation before the closed door that openeth not.

"That was good," said Marion Vincent, as the last of the party disappeared through the terrace window, and she and Diana were left alone—"but this is better."

She drew Diana toward her, kissed her, and smiled at her. But the smile wrung Diana's heart.

"Why have you been so ill?—and I never knew!" She wrapped a shawl round her friend, and, holding her hands, gazed into her face.

"It was all so hurried—there was so little time to think or remember. But now there is time."

"Now you are going to rest?—and get well?"

Marion smiled again.

"I shall have holiday for a few months—then rest."

"You won't live any more in the East End? You'll come to me—in the country?" said Diana, eagerly.

"Perhaps! But I want to see all I can in my holiday —before I rest! All my life I have lived in London. There has been nothing to see—but squalor. Do you know that I have lived next door to a fried-fish shop for

twelve years? But now—think!—I am in Italy—and we are going to the Alps—and we shall stay on Lake Como—and—and there is no end to our plans—if only my holiday is long enough."

What a ghost face!—and what shining eyes!

"Oh, but make it long enough!" pleaded Diana, laying one of the emaciated hands against her cheek, and smitten by a vague terror.

"That does not depend on me," said Marion, slowly.

"Marion," cried Diana, "tell me what you mean!"

Marion hesitated a moment, then said, quietly:

"Promise, dear, to take it quite simply—just as I tell it. I am so happy. There was an operation—six weeks ago. It was quite successful — I have no pain. The doctors give me seven or eight months. Then my enemy will come back—and my rest with him."

A cry escaped Diana as she buried her face in her friend's lap. Marion kissed and comforted her.

"If you only knew how happy I am!" she said, in a low voice. "Ever since I was a child I seem to have fought—fought hard for every step—every breath. I fought for bread first—and self-respect—for myself—then for others. One seemed to be hammering at shut gates or climbing precipices with loads that dragged one down. Such trouble always!" she murmured, with closed eyes—"such toil and anguish of body and brain! And now it is all over!"—she raised herself joyously—"I am already on the farther side. I am like St. Francis—waiting. And meanwhile I have a dear friend—who loves me. I can't let him marry me. Pain and disease and mutilation—of all those horrors, as far as I can, he shall know nothing. He shall not nurse me; he shall only love and lead me. But I have been

thirsting for beautiful things all my life—and he is giving them to me. I have dreamed of Italy since I was a baby, and here I am! I have seen Rome and Florence. We go on to Venice. And next week there will be mountains — and snow-peaks — rivers — forests —flowers—"

Her voice sank and died away. Diana clung to her, weeping, in a speechless grief and reverence. At the same time her own murdered love cried out within her, and in the hot despair of youth she told herself that life was as much finished for her as for this tired saint—this woman of forty—who had borne since her babyhood the burdens of the poor.

CHAPTER XVII

THE Whitsuntide recess passed—for the wanderers in Italy—in a glorious prodigality of sun, a rushing of bud and leaf to "feed in air," a twittering of birds, a splendor of warm nights, which for once indorsed the traditional rhapsodies of the poets. The little party of friends which had met at Assisi moved on together to Siena and Perugia, except for Marion Vincent and Frobisher. They quietly bade farewell, and went their way.

When Marion kissed Diana at parting, she said, with emphasis:

"Now, remember!—you are not to come to London! You are not to go to work in the East End. I forbid it! You are to go home — and look lovely—and be happy!"

Diana's eyes gazed wistfully into hers.

"I am afraid—I hadn't thought lately of coming to London," she murmured. "I suppose—I'm a coward. And just now I should be no good to anybody."

"All right. I don't care for your reasons—so long as you go home—and don't uproot."

Marion held her close. She had heard all the girl's story, had shown her the most tender sympathy. And on this strange wedding journey of hers she knew that she carried with her Diana's awed love and yearning remembrance.

But now she was eager to be gone—to be alone again with her best friend, in this breathing-space that remained to them.

So Diana saw them off—the shabby, handsome man, with his lean, proud, sincere face, and the woman, so frail and white, yet so indomitable. They carried various bags and parcels, mostly tied up with string, which represented all their luggage; they travelled with the peasants, fraternizing with them where they could; and it was useless, as Diana saw, to press luxuries on either of them. Many heads turned to look at them, in the streets or on the railway platform. There was something tragic in their aspect; yet not a trace of abjectness; nothing that asked for pity. When Diana last caught sight of them, Marion had a *contadino's* child on her knee, in the corner of a third-class carriage, and Frobisher opposite — he spoke a fluent Italian — was laughing and jesting with the father. Marion, smiling, waved her hand, and the train bore them away.

The others moved to Perugia, and the hours they spent together in the high and beautiful town were for all of them hours of well-being. Diana was the centre of the group. In the eyes of the three men her story invested her with a peculiar and touching interest. Their knowledge of it, and her silent acceptance of their knowledge, made a bond between her and them which showed itself in a hundred ways. Neither Ferrier, nor Chide, nor young Forbes could ever do too much for her, or think for her too loyally. And, on the other hand, it was her inevitable perception of their unspoken thoughts which gave her courage toward them—a kind of freedom which it is very difficult for women to feel or exercise in

the ordinary circumstances of life. She gave them each —gratefully—a bit of her heart, in different ways.

Bobbie had adopted her as elder sister, having none of his own; and by now she knew all about his engagement, his distaste for the Foreign Office, his lack of prospects there, and his determination to change it for some less expensive and more remunerative calling. But Lady Niton was the dragon in the path. She had all sorts of ambitious projects for him, none of which, according to Forbes, ever came off, there being always some better fellow to be had. Diplomacy, in her eyes, was the natural sphere of a young man of parts and family, and as for the money, if he would only show the smallest signs of getting on, she would find it. But in the service of his country Bobbie showed no signs whatever of "getting on." He hinted uncomfortably, in his conversations with Diana, at the long list of his obligations to Lady Niton—money lent, influence exerted, services of many kinds—spread over four or five years, ever since, after a chance meeting in a country-house, she had appointed herself his earthly providence, and he—an orphan of good family, with a small income and extravagant tastes—had weakly accepted her bounties.

"Now, of course, she insists on my marrying somebody with money. As if any chaperon would look at me! Two years ago I did make up to a nice girl—a real nice girl—and only a thousand a year!—nothing so tremendous, after all. But her mother twice carried her off, in the middle of a rattling ball, because she had engaged herself to me—just like sending a naughty child to bed! And the next time the mother made me take *her* down to supper, and expounded to me her view of a chaperon's duties: 'My business, Mr. Forbes'—you should have

seen her stony eye—'is to *mar*, not to make. The suitable marriages make themselves, or are made in heaven. I have nothing to do with them, except to keep a fair field. The unsuitable marriages have to be prevented, and will be prevented. You understand me?' 'Perfectly,' I said. 'I understand perfectly. To *mar* is human, and to make divine? Thank you. Have some more jelly? No? Shall I ask for your carriage? Goodnight.' But Lady Niton won't believe a word of it! She thinks I've only to ask and have. She'll be rude to Ettie, and I shall have to punch her head—metaphorically. And how can you punch a person's head when they've lent you money?"

Diana could only laugh, and commend him to his Ettie, who, to judge from her letters, was a girl of sense, and might be trusted to get him out of his scrape.

Meanwhile, Ferrier, the man of affairs, statesman, thinker, and pessimist, found in his new friendship with Diana at once that "agreement," that relaxation, which men of his sort can only find in the society of those women who, without competing with them, can yet by sympathy and native wit make their companionship abundantly worth while; and also, a means, as it were, of vicarious amends, which he very eagerly took.

He was, in fact, ashamed for Lady Lucy; humiliated, moreover, by his own small influence with her in a vital matter. And both shame and humiliation took the form of tender consideration for Lady Lucy's victim.

It did not at all diminish the value of his kindness, that—most humanly—it largely showed itself in what many people would have considered egotistical confessions to a charming girl. Diana found a constant distrac-

tion, a constant interest, in listening. Her solitary life with her scholar father had prepared her for such a friend. In the overthrow of love and feeling, she bravely tried to pick up the threads of the old intellectual pleasures. And both Ferrier and Chide, two of the ablest men of their generation, were never tired of helping her thus to recover herself. Chide was an admirable story-teller; and his mere daily life had stored him with tales, humorous and grim; while Ferrier talked history and poetry, as they strolled about Siena or Perugia; and, as he sat at night among the letters of the day, had a score of interesting or amusing comments to make upon the politics of the moment. He reserved his "confessions," of course, for the *tête-à-tête* of country walks. It was then that Diana seemed to be holding in her girlish hands something very complex and rare; a nature not easily to be understood by one so much younger. His extraordinary gifts, his disinterested temper, his astonishing powers of work raised him in her eyes to heroic stature. And then some very human weakness, some natural vanity, such as wives love and foster in their husbands, but which, in his case appeared merely forlorn and eccentric—some deep note of loneliness —would touch her heart, and rouse her pity. He talked generally with an amazing confidence, not untouched perhaps with arrogance, of the political struggle before him; believed he should carry the country with him, and impose his policy on a divided party. Yet again and again, amid the flow of hopeful speculation, Diana became aware, as on the first evening of Assisi, of some hidden and tragic doubt, both of fate and of himself, some deep-rooted weariness, against which the energy of his talk seemed to be perpetually reacting and

protesting. And the solitariness and meagreness of his life in all its personal and domestic aspects appalled her. She saw him often as a great man—a really great man—yet starved and shelterless—amid the storms that were beating up around him.

The friendship between him and Chide appeared to be very close, yet not a little surprising. They were old comrades in Parliament, and Chide was in the main a whole-hearted supporter of Ferrier's policy and views; resenting in particular, as Diana soon discovered, Marsham's change of attitude. But the two men had hardly anything else in common. Ferrier was an enormous reader, most variously accomplished; while his political Whiggery was balanced by a restless scepticism in philosophy and religion. For the rest he was an ascetic, even in the stream of London life; he cared nothing for most of the ordinary amusements; he played a vile hand at whist (bridge had not yet dawned upon a waiting world); he drank no wine, and was contentedly ignorant both of sport and games.

Chide, on the other hand, was as innocent of books as Lord Palmerston. All that was necessary for his career as a great advocate he could possess himself of in the twinkling of an eye; his natural judgment and acuteness were of the first order; his powers of eloquence among the most famous of his time; but it is doubtful whether Lady Niton would have found him much better informed about the politics of her youth than Barton himself; Sir James, too, was hazy about Louis Philippe, and could never remember, in the order of Prime Ministers, whether Canning or Lord Liverpool came first. With this, he was a simple and devout Catholic; loved on his holiday to serve the mass of some poor priest in a mountain

valley; and had more than once been known to carry off some lax Catholic junior on his circuit to the performance of his Easter duties, willy-nilly—by a mixture of magnetism and authority. For all games of chance he had a perfect passion; would play whist all night, and conduct a case magnificently all day. And although he was no sportsman in the ordinary sense, having had no opportunities in a very penurious youth, he had an Irishman's love of horseflesh, and knew the Derby winners from the beginning with as much accuracy as Macaulay knew the Senior Wranglers.

Yet the two men loved, respected, and understood each other. Diana wondered secretly, indeed, whether Sir James could have explained to her the bond between Ferrier and Lady Lucy. That, to her inexperience, was a complete mystery! Almost every day Ferrier wrote to Tallyn, and twice a week at least, as the letters were delivered at *table d'hôte*, Diana could not help seeing the long pointed writing on the thin black-edged paper which had once been for her the signal of doom. She hardly suspected, indeed, how often she herself made the subject of the man's letters. Ferrier wrote of her persistently to Lady Lucy, being determined that so much punishment at least should be meted out to that lady. The mistress of Tallyn, on her side, never mentioned the name of Miss Mallory. All the pages in his letters which concerned her might never have been written, and he was well aware that not a word of them would ever reach Oliver. Diana's pale and saddened beauty; the dignity which grief, tragic grief, free from all sordid or ignoble elements, can infuse into a personality; the affection she inspired, the universal sympathy that was felt for her: he dwelt on these things, till Lady Lucy, exasperated,

could hardly bring herself to open the envelopes which contained his lucubrations. Could any subject, in correspondence with herself, be more unfitting or more futile?—and what difference could it all possibly make to the girl's shocking antecedents?

One radiant afternoon, after a long day of sight-seeing, Diana and Mrs. Colwood retreated to their rooms to write letters and to rest; Forbes was hotly engaged in bargaining for an Umbrian *primitif*, which he had just discovered in an old house in a back street, whither, no doubt, the skilful antiquario had that morning transported it from his shop; and Sir James had gone out for a stroll, on the splendid road which winds gradually down the hill on which Perugia stands, to the tomb of the Volumnii, on the edge of the plain, and so on to Assisi and Foligno, in the blue distance.

Half-way down he met Ferrier, ascending from the tomb. Sir James turned, and they strolled back together. The Umbrian landscape girdling the superb town showed itself unveiled. Every gash on the torn white sides of the eastern Apennines, every tint of purple or porcelain-blue on the nearer hills, every plane of the smiling valley as it wound southward, lay bathed in a broad and searching light which yet was a light of beauty —of infinite illusion.

"I must say I have enjoyed my life," said Ferrier, abruptly, as they paused to look back, "though I don't put it altogether in the first class!"

Sir James raised his eyebrows—smiled—and did not immediately reply.

"Chide, old fellow," Ferrier resumed, turning to him, "before I left England I signed my will. Do you

object that I have named you one of the two executors?"

Sir James gave him a cordial glance.

"All right, I'll do my best—if need arises. I suppose, Johnnie, you're a rich man?"

The name "Johnnie," very rarely heard between them, went back to early days at the Bar, when Ferrier was for a time in the same chambers with the young Irishman who, within three years of being called, was making a large income; whereas Ferrier had very soon convinced himself that the Bar was not for him, nor he for the Bar, and being a man of means had "plumped" for politics.

"Yes, I'm not badly off," said Ferrier; "I'm almost the last of my family; and a lot of money has found its way to me first and last. It's been precious difficult to know what to do with it. If Oliver Marsham had stuck to that delightful girl I should have left it to him."

Sir James made a growling sound, more expressive than articulate.

"As it is," Ferrier resumed, "I have left half of it to my old Oxford college, and half to the University."

Chide nodded. Presently a slight flush rose in his very clear complexion, and he looked round on his companion with sparkling eyes.

"It is odd that you should have started this subject. I too have just signed a new will."

"Ah!" Ferrier's broad countenance showed a very human curiosity. "I believe you are scarcely more blessed with kindred than I?"

"No. In the main I could please myself. I have left the bulk of what I had to leave—to Miss Mallory."

"Excellent!" cried Ferrier. "She treats you already like a daughter."

"She is very kind to me," said Sir James, with a touch of ceremony that became him. "And there is no one in whom I feel a deeper interest."

"She must be made happy!" exclaimed Ferrier—"she *must!* Is there no one—besides Oliver?"

Sir James drew himself up. "I hope she has put all thought of Oliver out of her mind long since. Well!—I had a letter from Lady Felton last week—dear woman that!—all the love-affairs in the county come to roost in her mind. She talks of young Roughsedge. Perhaps you don't know anything of the gentleman?"

He explained, so far as his own knowledge went. Ferrier listened attentively. A soldier? Good. Handsome, modest, and capable?—better. Had just distinguished himself in this Nigerian expedition—mentioned in despatches last week. Better still!—so long as he kept clear of the folly of allowing himself to be killed. But as to the feelings of the young lady?

Sir James sighed. "I sometimes see in her traces of —of inheritance—which make one anxious."

Ferrier's astonishment showed itself in mouth and eyes.

"What I mean is," said Sir James, hastily, "a dramatic, impassioned way of looking at things. It would never do if she were to get any damned nonsense about 'expiation,' or not being free to marry, into her head."

Ferrier agreed, but a little awkwardly, since the "damned nonsense" was Lady Lucy's nonsense, and both knew it.

They walked slowly back to Assisi, first putting their elderly heads together a little further on the subject of Diana, and then passing on to the politics of the moment—to the ever present subject of the party revolt, and its effect on the election.

"Pshaw!—let them attack you as they please!" said Chide, after they had talked awhile. "You are safe enough. There is no one else. You are like the hero in a novel, 'the indispensable.'"

Ferrier laughed.

"Don't be so sure. There is always a 'supplanter'—when the time is ripe."

"Where is he? Who is he?"

"I had a very curious letter from Lord Philip this morning," said Ferrier, thoughtfully.

Chide's expression changed.

Lord Philip Darcy, a brilliant but quite subordinate member of the former Liberal Government, had made but occasional appearances in Parliament during the five years' rule of the Tories. He was a traveller and explorer, and when in England a passionate votary of the Turf. An incisive tongue, never more amusing than when it was engaged in railing at the English workman and democracy in general, a handsome person, and a strong leaning to Ritualism—these qualities and distinctions had not for some time done much to advance his Parliamentary position. But during the preceding session he had been more regular in his attendance at the House, and had made a considerable impression there—as a man of eccentric, but possibly great ability. On the whole, he had been a loyal supporter of Ferrier's; but in two or three recent speeches there had been signs of coquetting with the extremists.

Ferrier, having mentioned the letter, relapsed into silence. Sir James, with a little contemptuous laugh, inquired what the nature of the letter might be.

"Oh, well, he wants certain pledges." Ferrier drew the letter from his pocket, and handed it to his friend.

Sir James perused it, and handed it back with a sarcastic lip.

"He imagines you are going to accept that programme?"

"I don't know. But it is clear that the letter implies a threat if I don't."

"A threat of desertion? Let him."

"That letter wasn't written off his own bat. There is a good deal behind it. The plot, in fact, is thickening. From the letters of this morning I see that a regular press campaign is beginning."

He mentioned two party papers which had already gone over to the dissidents—one of some importance, the other of none.

"All right," said Chide; "so long as the *Herald* and the *Flag* do their duty. By-the-way, hasn't the *Herald* got a new editor?"

"Yes; a man called Barrington—a friend of Oliver's."

"Ah!—a good deal sounder on many points than Oliver!" grumbled Sir James.

Ferrier did not reply.

Chide noticed the invariable way in which Marsham's name dropped between them whenever it was introduced in this connection.

As they neared the gate of the town they parted, Chide returning to the hotel, while Ferrier, the most indefatigable of sight-seers, hurried off toward San Pietro.

He spent a quiet hour on the Peruginos, deciding, however, with himself in the end that they gave him but a moderate pleasure; and then came out again into the glow of an incomparable evening. Something in the light and splendor of the scene, as he lingered on the high terrace, hanging over the plain, looking down as

though from the battlements, the *flagrantia moenia* of some celestial city, challenged the whole life and virility of the man.

"Yet what ails me?" he thought to himself, curiously, and quite without anxiety. "It is as though I were listening—for the approach of some person or event—as though a door were open—or about to open—"

What more natural?—in this pause before the fight? And yet politics seemed to have little to do with it. The expectancy seemed to lie deeper, in a region of the soul to which none were or ever had been admitted, except some friends of his Oxford youth—long since dead.

And, suddenly, the contest which lay before him appeared to him under a new aspect, bathed in a broad philosophic air; a light serene and transforming, like the light of the Umbrian evening. Was it not possibly true that he had no future place as the leader of English Liberalism? Forces were welling up in its midst, forces of violent and revolutionary change, with which it might well be he had no power to cope. He saw himself, in a waking dream, as one of the last defenders of a lost position. The day of Utopias was dawning; and what has the critical mind to do with Utopias? Yet if men desire to attempt them, who shall stay them?

Barton, McEwart, Lankester—with their boundless faith in the power of a few sessions and measures to remake this old, old England—with their impatiences, their readiness at any moment to fling some wild arrow from the string, amid the crowded long-descended growths of English life: he felt a strong intellectual contempt both for their optimisms and audacities—mingled, perhaps; with a certain envy.

Sadness and despondency returned. His hand sought

in his pocket for the little volume of Leopardi which he had taken out with him. On that king of pessimists, that prince of all despairs, he had just spent half an hour among the olives. Could renunciation of life and contempt of the human destiny go further?

Well, Leopardi's case was not his. It was true, what he had said to Chide. With all drawbacks, he had enjoyed his life, had found it abundantly worth living.

And, after all, was not Leopardi himself a witness to the life he rejected, to the Nature he denounced. Ferrier recalled his cry to his brother: "Love me, Carlo. for God's sake! I need love, love, love!—fire, enthusiasm, life."

"*Fire, enthusiasm, life.*" Does the human lot contain these things, or no? If it does, have the gods mocked us, after all?

Pondering these great words, Ferrier strolled homeward, while the outpouring of the evening splendor died from Perusia Augusta, and the mountains sank deeper into the gold and purple of the twilight.

As for love, he had missed it long ago. But existence was still rich, still full of savor, so long as a man's will held his grip on men and circumstance.

All action, he thought, is the climbing of a precipice, upheld above infinity by one slender sustaining rope. Call it what we like—will, faith, ambition, the wish to live—in the end it fails us all. And in that moment, when we begin to imagine how and when it may fail us, we hear, across the sea of time, the first phantom tolling of the funeral bell.

There were times now when he seemed to feel the cold approaching breath of such a moment. But they were still invariably succeeded by a passionate recoil of life and

energy. By the time he reached the hotel he was once more plunged in all the preoccupations, the schemes, the pugnacities of the party leader.

A month later, on an evening toward the end of June, Dr. Roughsedge, lying reading in the shade of his little garden, saw his wife approaching. He raised himself with alacrity.

"You've seen her?"

"Yes."

With this monosyllabic answer Mrs. Roughsedge seated herself, and slowly untied her bonnet-strings.

"My dear, you seem discomposed."

"I hate *men!*" said Mrs. Roughsedge, vehemently.

The doctor raised his eyebrows. "I apologize for my existence. But you might go so far as to explain."

Mrs. Roughsedge was silent.

"How is that child?" said the doctor, abruptly. "Come!—I am as fond of her as you are."

Mrs. Roughsedge raised her handkerchief.

"That any man with a heart—" she began, in a stifled voice.

"Why you should speculate on anything so abnormal!" cried the doctor, impatiently. "I suppose your remark applies to Oliver Marsham. Is she breaking her own heart?—that's all that signifies."

"She is extremely well and cheerful."

"Well, then, what's the matter?"

Mrs. Roughsedge looked out of the window, twisting her handkerchief.

"Nothing — only — everything seems done and finished."

"At twenty-two?" The doctor laughed. "And it's

not quite four months yet since the poor thing discovered that her doll was stuffed with sawdust. Really, Patricia!"

Mrs. Roughsedge slowly shook her head.

"I suspect what it all means," said her husband, "is that she did not show as much interest as she ought in Hugh's performance."

"She was most kind, and asked me endless questions. She made me promise to bring her the press-cuttings and read her his letters. She could not possibly have shown more sympathy."

"H'm!—well, I give it up."

"Henry!"—his wife turned upon him—"I am convinced that poor child will never marry!"

"Give her time, my dear, and don't talk nonsense!"

"It isn't nonsense! I tell you I felt just as I did when I went to see Mary Theed, years ago—you remember that pretty cousin of mine who became a Carmelite nun?—for the first time after she had taken the veil. She spoke to one from another world—it gave one the shivers!—and was just as smiling and cheerful over it as Diana—and it was just as ghastly and unbearable and abominable—as this is."

"Well, then," said the doctor, after a pause, "I suppose she'll take to good works. I hope you can provide her with a lot of hopeless cases in the village. Did she mention Marsham at all?"

"Not exactly. But she asked about the election—"

"The writs are out," interrupted the doctor. "I see the first borough elections are fixed for three weeks hence; ours will be one of the last of the counties; six weeks to-day."

"I told her you thought he would get in."

"Yes—by the skin of his teeth. All his real popularity has vanished like smoke. But there's the big estate—and his mother's money—and the collieries."

"The Vicar tells me the colliers are discontented—all through the district—and there may be a big strike—"

"Yes, perhaps in the autumn, when the three years' agreement comes to an end—not yet. Marsham's vote will run down heavily in the mining villages, but it 'll serve—this time. They won't put the other man in."

Mrs. Roughsedge rose to take off her things, remarking, as she moved away, that Marsham was said to be holding meetings nightly already, and that Lady Lucy and Miss Drake were both hard at work.

"Miss Drake?" said the doctor, looking up. "Handsome girl! I saw Marsham in a dog-cart with her yesterday afternoon."

Mrs. Roughsedge flushed an angry red, but she said nothing. She was encumbered with parcels, and her husband rose to open the door for her. He stooped and looked into her face.

"You didn't say anything about *that*, Patricia, I'll be bound!"

Meanwhile, Diana was wandering about the Beechcote garden, with her hands full of roses, just gathered. The garden glowed under the westering sun. In the field just below it the silvery lines of new-cut hay lay hot and fragrant in the quivering light. The woods on the hillside were at the richest moment of their new life, the earth-forces swelling and rioting through every root and branch, wild roses climbing every hedge—the miracle of summer at its height.

Diana sat down upon a grass-bank, to look and dream.

The flowers dropped beside her; she propped her face on her hands.

The home-coming had been hard. And perhaps the element in it she had felt most difficult to bear had been the universal sympathy with which she had been greeted. It spoke from the faces of the poor—the men and women, the lads and girls of the village; with their looks of curiosity, sometimes frank, sometimes furtive or embarrassed. It was more politely disguised in the manners and tones of the gentle people; but everywhere it was evident; and sometimes it was beyond her endurance.

She could not help imagining the talk about her in her absence; the discussion of the case in the country-houses or in the village. To the village people, unused to the fine discussions which turn on motive and environment, and slow to revise an old opinion, she was just the daughter—

She covered her eyes — one hideous word ringing brutally, involuntarily, through her brain. By a kind of miserable obsession the talk in the village public-houses shaped itself in her mind. "Ay, they didn't hang her because she was a lady. She got off, trust her! But if it had been you or me—"

She rose, trembling, trying to shake off the horror, walking vaguely through the garden into the fields, as though to escape it. But the horror pursued her, only in different forms. Among the educated people—people who liked dissecting "interesting" or "mysterious" crimes—there had been no doubt long discussions of Sir James Chide's letter to the *Times*, of Sir Francis Wing's confession. But through all the talk, rustic or refined, she heard the name of her mother bandied; forever

soiled and dishonored; with no right to privacy or courtesy any more—"Juliet Sparling" to all the world: the loafer at the street corner—the drunkard in the tavern—

The thought of this vast publicity, this careless or cruel scorn of the big world—toward one so frail, so anguished, so helpless in death—clutched Diana many times in each day and night. And it led to that perpetual image in the mind which we saw haunting her in the first hours of her grief, as though she carried her dying mother in her arms, passionately clasping and protecting her, their faces turned to each other, and hidden from all eyes besides.

Also, it deadened in her the sense of her own case—in relation to the gossip of the neighborhood. Ostrich-like, she persuaded herself that not many people could have known anything about her five days' engagement. Dear kind folk like the Roughsedges would not talk of it, nor Lady Lucy surely. And Oliver himself—never!

She had reached a point in the field walk where the hill-side opened to her right, and the little winding path was disclosed which had been to her on that mild February evening the path of Paradise. She stood still a moment, looking upward, the deep sob of loss rising in her throat.

But she wrestled with herself, and presently turned back to the house, calm and self-possessed. There were things to be thankful for. She knew the worst. And she felt herself singularly set free—from ordinary conventions and judgments. Nobody could ever quarrel with her if, now that she had come back, she lived her own life in her own way. Nobody could blame her—surely most people would approve her—if she stood aloof from ordinary society, and ordinary gayeties for

a while, at any rate. Oh! she would do nothing singular or rude. But she was often tired and weak — not physically, but in mind. Mrs. Roughsedge knew—and Muriel.

Dear Hugh Roughsedge!—he was indeed a faithful understanding friend. She was proud of his letters; she was proud of his conduct in the short campaign just over; she looked forward to his return in the autumn. But he must not cherish foolish thoughts or wishes. She would never marry. What Lady Lucy said was true. She had probably no right to marry. She stood apart.

But—but—she must not be asked yet to give herself to any great mission—any set task of charity or philanthropy. Her poor heart fluttered within her at the thought, and she clung gratefully to the recollection of Marion's imperious words to her. That exaltation with which, in February, she had spoken to the Vicar of going to the East End to work had dropped—quite dropped.

Of course, there was a child in the village—a dear child—ill and wasting—in a spinal jacket, for whom one would do anything—just anything! And there was Betty Dyson—plucky, cheerful old soul. But that was another matter.

What, she asked, had she to give the poor? She wanted guiding and helping and putting in the right way herself. She could not preach to any one—wrestle with any one. And ought one to make out of others' woes plasters for one's own? To use the poor as the means of a spiritual "cure" seemed a dubious indecent thing; more than a touch in it of arrogance—or sacrilege.

Meanwhile she had been fighting her fight in the old

ways. She had been falling back on her education, appealing to books and thought, reminding herself of what the life of the mind had been to her father in his misery, and of those means of cultivating it to which he would certainly have commended her. She was trying to learn a new foreign language, and, under Marion Vincent's urging, the table in the little sitting-room was piled with books on social and industrial matters, which she diligently read and pondered.

It was all struggle and effort. But it had brought her some reward. And especially through Marion Vincent's letters, and through the long day with Marion in London, which she had now to look back upon. For Miss Vincent and Frobisher had returned, and Marion was once more in her Stepney rooms. She was apparently not much worse; would allow no talk about herself; and though she had quietly relinquished all her old activities, her room was still the centre it had long been for the London thinker and reformer.

Diana found there an infinity to learn. The sages and saints, it seemed, are of all sides and all opinions. That had not been the lesson of her youth. In a comforting heat of prejudice her father had found relief from suffering, and his creeds had been fused with her young blood. Lately she had seen their opposites embodied in a woman from whom she shrank in repulsion—whose name never passed her lips—Oliver's sister—who had trampled on her in her misery. Yet here, in Marion's dingy lodging, she saw the very same ideas which Isabel Fotheringham made hateful, clothed in light, speaking from the rugged or noble faces of men and women who saw in them the salvation of their kind.

The intellect in Diana, the critical instinct resisted.

And, moreover, to have abandoned any fraction of the conservative and traditional beliefs in which she had been reared was impossible for her of all women; it would have seemed to her that she was thereby leaving those two suffering ones, whom only her love sheltered, still lonelier in death. So, beneath the clatter of talk and opinion, run the deep omnipotent tides of our real being.

But if the mind resisted, the heart felt, and therewith, the soul — that total personality which absorbs and transmutes the contradictions of life—grew kinder and gentler within her.

One day, after a discussion on votes for women which had taken place beside Marion's sofa, Diana, when the talkers were gone, had thrown herself on her friend.

"Dear, you can't wish it!—you can't believe it! To brutalize—unsex us!"

Marion raised herself on her elbow, and looked down the narrow cross street beneath the windows of her lodging. It was a stifling evening. The street was strewn with refuse, the odors from it filled the room. Ragged children with smeared faces were sitting or playing listlessly in the gutters. The public-house at the corner was full of animation, and women were passing in and out. Through the roar of traffic from the main street beyond a nearer sound persisted: a note of wailing—the wailing of babes.

"There are the unsexed!" said Marion, panting. "Is their brutalization the price we pay for our refinement?" Then, as she sank back: "Try anything—everything—to change that."

Diana pressed the speaker's hand to her lips.

But from Marion Vincent, the girl's thoughts, as she wandered in the summer garden, had passed on to the news which Mrs. Roughsedge had brought her. Oliver was speaking every night, almost, in the villages round Beechcote. Last week he had spoken at Beechcote itself. Since Mrs. Roughsedge's visit, Diana had borrowed the local paper from Brown, and had read two of Oliver's speeches therein reported. As she looked up to the downs, or caught through the nearer trees the lines of distant woods, it was as though the whole scene—earth and air—were once more haunted for her by Oliver—his presence — his voice. Beechcote lay on the high-road from Tallyn to Dunscombe, the chief town of the division. Several times a week, at least, he must pass the gate. At any moment they might meet face to face.

The sooner the better! Unless she abandoned Beechcote, they must learn to meet on the footing of ordinary acquaintances; and it were best done quickly.

Voices on the lawn! Diana, peeping through the trees, beheld the Vicar in conversation with Muriel Colwood. She turned and fled, pausing at last in the deepest covert of the wood, breathless and a little ashamed.

She had seen him once since her return. Everybody was so kind to her, the Vicar, the Miss Bertrams—everybody; only the pity and the kindness burned so. She wrestled with these feelings in the wood, but she none the less kept a thick screen between herself and Mr. Lavery.

She could never forget that night of her misery when —good man that he was!—he had brought her the message of his faith.

But the great melting moments of life are rare, and the tracts between are full of small frictions. What an

incredible sermon he had preached on the preceding Sunday! That any minister of the national church—representing all sorts and conditions of men—should think it right to bring his party politics into the pulpit in that way! Unseemly! unpardonable!

Her dark eyes flashed—and then clouded. She had walked home from the sermon in a heat of wrath, had straightway sought out some blue ribbon, and made Tory rosettes for herself and her dog. Muriel had laughed—had been delighted to see her doing it.

But the rosettes were put away now—thrown into the bottom of a drawer. She would never wear them.

The Vicar, it seemed, was no friend of Oliver's—would not vote for him, and had been trying to induce the miners at Hartingfield to run a Labor man. On the other hand, she understood that the Ferrier party in the division were dissatisfied with him on quite other grounds: that they reproached him with a leaning to violent and extreme views, and with a far too lukewarm support of the leader of the party and the leader's policy. The local papers were full of grumbling letters to that effect.

Her brow knit over Oliver's difficulties. The day before, Mr. Lavery, meeting Muriel in the village street, had suggested that Miss Mallory might lend him the barn for a Socialist meeting—a meeting, in fact, for the harassing and heckling of Oliver.

Had he come now to urge the same plea again? A woman's politics were not, of course, worth remembering!

She moved on to a point where, still hidden, she could see the lawn. The Vicar was in full career; the harsh creaking voice came to her from the distance. What an awkward unhandsome figure, with his long, lank

countenance, his large ears and spectacled eyes! Yet an apostle, she admitted, in his way—a whole-hearted, single-minded gentleman. But the barn he should not have.

She watched him depart, and then slowly emerged from her hiding-place. Muriel, putting loving hands on her shoulders, looked at her with eyes that mocked a little—tenderly.

"Yes, I know," said Diana—"I know. I shirked. Did he want the barn?"

"Oh no. I convinced him, the other day, you were past praying for."

"Was he shocked? 'It is a serious thing for women to throw themselves across the path of progress,'" said Diana, in a queer voice.

Muriel looked at her, puzzled. Diana reddened, and kissed her.

"What did he want, then?"

"He came to ask whether you would take the visiting of Fetter Lane—and a class in Sunday-school."

Diana gasped.

"What did you say?"

"Never mind. He went away quelled."

"No doubt he thought I ought to be glad to be set to work."

"Oh! they are all masterful—that sort."

Diana walked on.

"I suppose he gossiped about the election?"

"Yes. He has all sorts of stories—about the mines—and the Tallyn estates," said Muriel, unwillingly.

Diana's look flashed.

"Do you believe he has any power of collecting evidence fairly? I don't. He sees what he wants to see."

Mrs. Colwood agreed; but did not feel called upon to

confirm Diana's view by illustrations. She kept Mr. Lavery's talk to herself.

Presently, as the evening fell, Diana sitting under the limes watching the shadows lengthen on the new-mown grass, wondered whether she had any mind—any opinions of her own at all. Her father; Oliver; Mr. Ferrier; Marion Vincent — she saw and felt with them all in turn. In the eyes of a Mrs. Fotheringham could anything be more despicable?

The sun was sinking when she stole out of the garden with some flowers and peaches for Betty Dyson. Her frequent visits to Betty's cottage were often the bright spots in her day. With her, almost alone among the poor people, Diana was conscious of no greedy curiosity behind the spoken words. Yet Betty was the living chronicle of the village, and what she did not know about its inhabitants was not worth knowing.

Diana found her white and suffering as usual, but so bubbling with news that she had no patience either with her own ailments or with the peaches. Waving both aside, she pounced imperiously upon her visitor, her queer yellowish eyes aglow with "eventful living."

"Did you hear of old Tom Murthly dropping dead in the medder last Thursday?"

Diana had just heard of the death of the eccentric old man who for fifty years—bachelor and miser—had inhabited a dilapidated house in the village.

"Well, he did. Yo may take it at that—yo may." (A mysterious phrase, equivalent, no doubt, to the masculine oath.) "'Ee 'ad a lot of money—Tom 'ad. Them two 'ouses was 'is what stands right be'ind Learoyds', down the village."

"Who will they go to now, Betty?"

Betty's round, shapeless countenance, furrowed and scarred by time, beamed with the joy of communication.

"*Chancery!*" she said, nodding. "Chancery 'll 'ave 'em, in a twelvemonth's time from now, if Mrs. Jack Murthly's Tom—young Tom—don't claim 'em from South Africa—and the Lord knows where *ee* is!"

Diana tried to follow, held captive by a tyrannical pair of eyes.

"And what relation is Mrs. Jack Murthly to the man who died?"

"Brother's wife!" said Betty, sharply. "I thought you'd ha' known that."

"But if nothing is heard of the son, Betty—of young Tom—Mrs. Murthly's two daughters will have the cottages, won't they?"

Betty's scorn made her rattle her stick on the flagged floor.

"They ain't daughters!—they're only 'alves."

"Halves?" said Diana, bewildered.

"Jack Murthly worn't their father!" A fresh shower of nods. "Yo may take it at that!"

"Well, then, who—?"

Betty bent hastily forward—Diana had placed herself on a stool before her—and, thrusting out her wrinkled lips, said, in a hoarse whisper:

"Two fathers!"

There was a silence.

"I don't understand, Betty," said Diana, softly.

"Jack was '*is* father, all right—Tom's in South Africa. But he worn't *their* father, Mrs. Jack bein' a widder—or said so. They're only 'alves—and 'alves ain't no good in law; so inter Chancery those 'ouses 'll go, come a twelvemonth—yo may take it at that!"

Diana laughed—a young spontaneous laugh—the first since she had come home. She kept Betty gossiping for half an hour, and as the stream of the village life poured about her, in Betty's racy speech, it was as though some primitive virtue entered into her and cheered her—some bracing voice from the Earth-spirit—whose purpose is not missed

"If birth proceeds—if things subsist."

She rose at last, held Betty's hand tenderly, and went her way, conscious of a return of natural pleasure, such as Italy had never brought her, her heart opening afresh to England and the English life.

Perhaps she would find at home a letter from Mr. Ferrier—her dear, famous friend, who never forgot her, ignorant as she was of the great affairs in which he was plunged. But she meant to be ignorant no longer. No more brooding and dreaming! It was pleasant to remember that Sir James Chide had taken a furnished house—Lytchett Manor—only a few miles from Beechcote, and that Mr. Ferrier was to be his guest there as soon as politics allowed. For her, Diana, that was well, for if he were at Tallyn they could have met but seldom if at all.

She had made a round through a distant and sequestered lane in order to prolong her walk. Presently she came to a deep cutting in the chalk, where the road, embowered in wild roses and clematis, turned sharply at the foot of a hill. As she approached the turn she heard sounds—a man's voice. Her heart suddenly failed her. She looked to either side—no gate, no escape. Nothing for it but to go forward. She turned the corner.

Before her was a low pony carriage which Alicia Drake was driving. It was drawn up by the side of the road, and Alicia sat in it, laughing and talking, while Oliver Marsham gathered a bunch of wild roses from the roadside. As Diana appeared, and before either of them saw her, Marsham returned to the carriage, his hands full of flowers.

"Will that content you? I have torn myself to ribbons for you!"

"Oh, don't expect too much gratitude—*Oliver!*" The last word was low and hurried. Alicia gathered up the reins hastily, and Marsham looked round him—startled.

He saw a tall and slender girl coming toward them, accompanied by a Scotch collie. She bowed to him and to Alicia, and passed quickly on.

"Never mind any more roses," said Alicia. "We ought to get home."

They drove toward Tallyn in silence. Alicia's startling hat of white muslin framed the red gold of her hair, and the brilliant color—assisted here and there by rouge—of her cheeks and lips. She said presently, in a sympathetic voice:

"How sorry one is for her!"

Marsham made no reply. They passed into the darkness of overarching trees, and there, veiled from him in the green twilight, Alicia no longer checked the dancing triumph in her eyes.

CHAPTER XVIII

ONE Saturday in early August, some weeks after the incident described in the last chapter, Bobbie Forbes, in the worst inn's worst fly, such being the stress and famine of election time, drove up to the Tallyn front door. It was the day after the polling, and Tallyn, with its open windows and empty rooms, had the look of a hive from which the bees have swarmed. According to the butler, only Lady Niton was at home, and the household was eagerly awaiting news of the declaration of the poll at Dunscombe Town Hall. Lady Niton, indeed, was knitting in the drawing-room.

"Capital!—to find you alone," said Bobbie, taking a seat beside her. "All the others at Dunscombe, I hear. And no news yet?"

Lady Niton, who had given him one inky finger—(a pile of letters just completed lay beside her)—shook her head, looking him critically up and down the while.

The critical eye, however, was more required in her own case. She was untidily dressed, as usual, in a shabby black gown; her brown "front" was a little displaced, and her cap awry; and her fingers had apparently been badly worsted in a struggle with her pen. Yet her diminutive figure in the drawing-room — such is the power of personality—made a social place of it at once.

"I obeyed your summons," Bobbie continued, "though I'm sure Lady Lucy didn't want to invite me

with all this hubbub going on. Well, what do you prophesy? They told me at the station that the result would be out by two o'clock. I very nearly went to the Town Hall, but the fact is everybody's so nervous I funked it. If Oliver's kicked out, the fewer tears over spilled milk the better."

"He won't be kicked out."

"Don't make too sure! I have been hearing the most dismal reports. The Ferrierites hate him much worse than if he'd gone against them openly. And the fellows he really agrees with don't love him much better."

"All the same he will get in; and if he don't get office now he will in a few years."

"Oliver must be flattered that you believe in him so."

"I don't believe in him at all," said Lady Niton, sharply. "Every country has the politicians it deserves."

Bobbie grinned.

"I don't find you a democrat yet."

"I'm just as much of one as anybody in this house, for all their fine talk. Only they pretend to like being governed by their plumbers and gas-fitters, and I don't."

"I hear that Oliver's speeches have been extremely good."

"H'm—all about the poor," said Lady Niton, releasing her hand from the knitting-needles, and waving it scornfully at the room in which they sat. "Well, if Oliver were to tell me from now till doomsday that his heart bled for the poor, I shouldn't believe him. It doesn't bleed. He is as comfortable in his middle region as you or I."

Bobbie laughed.

"Now look here, I'm simply famished for gossip, and I must have it." Lady Niton's ball of wool fell on the

floor. Bobbie pounced upon it, and put it in his pocket. "A hostage! Surrender—and talk to me! Do you belong to the Mallory faction—or don't you?"

"Give me my ball, sir—and don't dare to mention that girl's name in this house."

Bobbie opened his eyes.

"I say!—what did you mean by writing to me like that if you weren't on the right side?"

"What do you mean?"

"You can't have gone over to Lady Lucy and the Fotheringham woman!"

Lady Niton looked at him with a queer expression of contempt in her tanned and crumpled face.

"Is that the only reason you can imagine for my not permitting you to talk of Diana Mallory in this house?"

Bobbie looked puzzled. Then a light broke.

"I see! You mean the house isn't good enough? Precisely! What's up. Alicia? *No!*"

Lady Niton laughed.

"He has been practically engaged to her for two years. He didn't know it, of course—he hadn't an idea of it. But Alicia knew it. Oh! she allowed him his amusements. The Mallory girl was one of them. If the Sparling story hadn't broken it off, something else would. I don't believe Alicia ever alarmed herself."

"Are they engaged?"

"Not formally. I dare say it won't be announced till the autumn," said his companion, indifferently. Then seeing that Bobbie's attention was diverted, she made a dash with one skinny hand at his coat-pocket, abstracted the ball of wool, and triumphantly returned to her knitting.

"Mean!" said Bobbie. "You caught me off guard.

Well, I wish them joy. Of course, I've always liked Marsham, and I'm very sorry he's got himself into such a mess. But as for Alicia, there's no love lost between us. I hear Miss Mallory's at Beechcote."

Lady Niton replied that she had only been three days in the house, that she had asked—ostentatiously—for a carriage the day before to take her to call at Beechcote, and had been refused. Everything, it seemed, was wanted for election purposes. But she understood that Miss Mallory was quite well and not breaking her heart at all. At the present moment she was the most popular person in Brookshire, and would be the most petted, if she would allow it. But she and Mrs. Colwood lived a very quiet life, and were never to be seen at the tea and garden parties in which the neighborhood abounded.

"Plucky of her to come back here!" said Bobbie. "And how's Lady Lucy?"

Lady Niton moved impatiently.

"Lucy would be all right if her son wouldn't join a set of traitors in jockeying the man who put him into Parliament, and has been Lucy's quasi-husband for twenty years!"

"Oh, you think he *is* in the plot?"

"Of course, Lucy swears he isn't. But if not—why isn't Ferrier here? His own election was over a week ago. In the natural course of things he would have been staying here since then, and speaking for Oliver. Not a word of it! I'm glad he's shown a little spirit at last! He's put up with it about enough."

"And Lady Lucy's fretting?"

"She don't like it—particularly when he comes to stay with Sir James Chide and not at Tallyn. Such a thing has never happened before."

"Poor old Ferrier!" said Bobbie, with a shrug of the shoulders.

Lady Niton drew herself up fiercely.

"Don't pity your betters, sir! It's disrespectful."

Bobbie smiled. "You know the Ministry's resigned?"

"About time! What have they been hanging on for so long?"

"Well, it's done at last. I found a wire from the club waiting for me here. The Queen has sent for Broadstone, and the fat's all in the fire."

The two fell into an excited discussion of the situation. The two rival heroes of the electoral six weeks on the Liberal side had been, of course, Ferrier and Lord Philip. Lord Philip had conducted an astonishing campaign in the Midlands, through a series of speeches of almost revolutionary violence, containing many veiled, or scarcely veiled, attacks on Ferrier. Ferrier, on the whole held the North; but the candidates in the Midlands had been greatly affected by Lord Philip and Lord Philip's speeches, and a contagious enthusiasm had spread through whole districts, carrying in the Liberal candidates with a rush. In the West and South, too, where the Darcy family had many friends and large estates, the Liberal nominees had shown a strong tendency to adopt Lord Philip's programme and profess enthusiastic admiration for its author. So that there were now two kings of Brentford. Lord Philip's fortunes had risen to a threatening height, and the whole interest of the Cabinet-making just beginning lay in the contest which it inevitably implied between Ferrier and his new but formidable lieutenant. It was said that Lord Philip had retired to his tent—alias, his Northamptonshire house

—and did not mean to budge thence till he had got all he wanted out of the veteran Premier.

"As for the papers," said Bobbie, "you see they're already at it hammer and tongs. However, so long as the *Herald* sticks to Ferrier, he has very much the best of it. This new editor Barrington is an awfully clever fellow."

"Barrington!—Barrington!" said Lady Niton, looking up, "That's the man who's coming to-night."

"Coming here?—Barrington? Hullo, I wonder what's up?"

"He proposed himself, Oliver says; he's an old friend."

"They were at Trinity together. But he doesn't really care much about Oliver. I'm certain he's not coming here for Oliver's *beaux yeux*, or Lady Lucy's."

"What does it matter?" cried Lady Niton, disdainfully.

"H'm!—you think 'em all a poor lot?"

"Well, when you've known Dizzy and Peel, Palmerston and Melbourne, you're not going to stay awake nights worriting about John Ferrier. In any other house but this I should back Lord Philip. But I like to make Oliver uncomfortable."

"Upon my word! I have heard you say that Lord Philip's speeches were abominable."

"So they are. But he ought to have credit for the number of 'em he can turn out in a week."

"He'll be heard, in fact, for his much speaking?"

Bobbie looked at his companion with a smile. Suddenly his cheek flushed. He sat down beside her and tried to take her hand.

"Look here," he said, with vivacity, "I think you were an awful brick to stick up for Miss Mallory as you did."

Lady Niton withdrew her hand.

"I haven't an idea what you're driving at."

"You really thought that Oliver should have given up all that money?"

His companion looked at him rather puzzled.

"He wouldn't have been a pauper," she said, dryly; "the girl had some."

"Oh, but not much. No!—you took a dear, unworldly generous view of it!—a view which has encouraged me immensely!"

"You!" Lady Niton drew back, and drew up, as though scenting battle, while her wig and cap slipped more astray.

"Yes—me. It's made me think—well, that I ought to have told you a secret of mine weeks ago."

And with a resolute and combative air, Bobbie suddenly unburdened himself of the story of his engagement—to a clergyman's daughter, without a farthing, his distant cousin on his mother's side, and quite unknown to Lady Niton.

His listener emitted a few stifled cries—asked a few furious questions—and then sat rigid.

"Well?" said Bobbie, masking his real anxiety under a smiling appearance.

With a great effort, Lady Niton composed herself. She stretched out a claw and resumed her work, two red spots on her cheeks.

"Marry her, if you like," she said, with delusive calm. "I sha'n't ever speak to you again. A scheming minx without a penny!—that ought never to have been allowed out of the school-room."

Bobbie leaped from his chair.

"Is that the way you mean to take it?"

Lady Niton nodded.

"That is the way I mean to take it!"

"What a fool I was to believe your fine speeches about Oliver!"

"Oliver may go to the devil!" cried Lady Niton.

"Very well!" Bobbie's dignity was tremendous. "Then I don't mean to be allowed less liberty than Oliver. It's no good continuing this conversation. Why, I declare! some fool has been meddling with those books!"

And rapidly crossing the floor, swelling with wrath and determination, Bobbie opened the bookcase of first editions which stood in this inner drawing-room and began to replace some volumes, which had strayed from their proper shelves, with a deliberate hand.

"You resemble Oliver in one thing!" Lady Niton threw after him.

"What may that be?" he said, carelessly.

"You both find gratitude inconvenient!"

Bobbie turned and bowed. "I do!" he said, "inconvenient, and intolerable! Hullo!—I hear the carriage. I beg you to remark that what I told you was confidential. It is not to be repeated in company."

Lady Niton had only time to give him a fierce look when the door opened, and Lady Lucy came wearily in.

Bobbie hastened to meet her.

"My dear Lady Lucy!—what news?"

"Oliver is in!"

"Hurrah!" Bobbie shook her hand vehemently. "I am glad!"

Lady Niton, controlling herself with difficulty, rose from her seat, and also offered a hand.

"There, you see, Lucy, you needn't have been so anxious."

Lady Lucy sank into a chair.

"What's the majority?" said Bobbie, astonished by her appearance and manner. "I say, you know, you've been working too hard."

"The majority is twenty-four," said Lady Lucy, coldly, as though she had rather not have been asked the question; and at the same time, leaning heavily back in her chair, she began feebly to untie the lace strings of her bonnet. Bobbie was shocked by her appearance. She had aged rapidly since he had last seen her, and, in particular, a gray shadow had overspread the pink-and-white complexion which had so long preserved her good looks.

On hearing the figures (the majority five years before had been fifteen hundred), Bobbie could not forbear an exclamation which produced another contraction of Lady Lucy's tired brow. Lady Niton gave a very audible "Whew!"—to which she hastened to add: "Well, Lucy, what does it matter? Twenty-four is as good as two thousand."

Lady Lucy roused herself a little.

"Of course," she said, languidly, "it is disappointing. But we may be glad it is no worse. For a little while, during the counting, we thought Oliver was out. But the last bundles to be counted were all for him, and we just saved it." A pause, and then the speaker added, with emphasis: "It has been a *horrid* election! Such ill-feeling—and violence—such unfair placards!—some of them, I am sure, were libellous. But I am told one can do nothing."

"Well, my dear, this is what Democracy comes to," said Lady Niton, taking up her knitting again with vehemence. "'*Tu l'as voulu, Georges Dandin.*' You Liberals have opened the gates—and now you grumble at the deluge."

"It has been the injustice shown him by his own side that Oliver minds." The speaker's voice betrayed the bleeding of the inward wound. "Really, to hear some of our neighbors talk, you would think him a Communist. And, on the other hand, he and Alicia only just escaped being badly hurt this morning at the collieries—when they were driving round. I implored them not to go. However, they would. There was an ugly crowd, and but for a few mounted police that came up, it might have been most unpleasant."

"I suppose Alicia has been careering about with him all day?" said Lady Niton.

"Alicia—and Roland Lankester—and the chairman of Oliver's committee. Now they've gone off on the coach, to drive round some of the villages, and thank people." Lady Lucy rose as she spoke.

"Not much to thank for, according to you!" observed Lady Niton, grimly.

"Oh, well, he's in!" Lady Lucy drew a long breath. "But people have behaved so extraordinarily! That man—that clergyman—at Beechcote—Mr. Lavery. He's been working night and day against Oliver. Really, I think parsons ought to leave politics alone."

"Lavery?" said Bobbie. "I thought he was a Radical. Weren't Oliver's speeches advanced enough to please him?"

"He has been denouncing Oliver as a humbug, because of what he is pleased to call the state of the mining villages. I'm sure they're a great, great deal better than they were twenty years ago!" Lady Lucy's voice was almost piteous. "However, he very nearly persuaded the miners to run a candidate of their own, and when that fell through, he advised them to abstain from vot-

ing. And they must have done so—in several villages. That's pulled down the majority."

"Abominable!" said Bobbie, who was comfortably conservative. "I always said that man was a firebrand."

"I don't know what he expects to get by it," said Lady Lucy, slowly, as she moved toward the door. Her tone was curiously helpless; she was still stately, but it was a ghostly and pallid stateliness.

"Get by it!" sneered Lady Niton. "After all, his friends are in. They say he's eloquent. His jackasseries will get him a bishopric in time—you'll see."

"It was the unkindness—the ill-feeling—I minded," said Lady Lucy, in a low voice, leaning heavily upon her stick, and looking straight before her as though she inwardly recalled some of the incidents of the election. "I never knew anything like it before."

Lady Niton lifted her eyebrows—not finding a suitable response. Did Lucy really not understand what was the matter?—that her beloved Oliver had earned the reputation throughout the division of a man who can propose to a charming girl, and then desert her for money, at the moment when the tragic blow of her life had fallen upon her?—and she, that of the mercenary mother who had forced him into it. Precious lucky for Oliver to have got in at all!

The door closed on Lady Lucy. Forgetting for an instant what had happened before her hostess entered, Elizabeth Niton, bristling with remarks, turned impetuously toward Forbes. He had gone back to first editions, and was whistling vigorously as he worked. With a start, Lady Niton recollected herself. Her face reddened afresh; she rose, walked with as much majesty

as her station admitted to the door, which she closed sharply behind her.

As soon as she was gone Bobbie stopped whistling. If she was really going to make a quarrel of it, it would certainly be a great bore—a hideous bore. His conscience pricked him for the mean and unmanly dependence which had given the capricious and masterful little woman so much to say in his affairs. He must really find fresh work, pay his debts, those to Lady Niton first and foremost, and marry the girl who would make a decent fellow of him. But his heart smote him about his queer old Fairy Blackstick. No surrender!—but he would like to make peace.

It was past eight o'clock when the four-in-hand on which the new member had been touring the constituency drove up to the Tallyn door. Forbes hurried to the steps to greet the party.

"Hullo, Oliver! A thousand congratulations, old fellow! Never mind the figures. A win's a win! But I thought you would have been dining and junketing in Dunscombe to-night. How on earth did you get them to let you off?"

Oliver's tired countenance smiled perfunctorily as he swung himself down from the coach. He allowed his hand to be shaken; his lips moved, but only a husky whisper emerged.

"Lost his voice," Roland Lankester explained. "And so done that we begged him off from the Dunscombe dinner. He's only fit for bed."

And with a wave of the hand to the company, Marsham, weary and worn, mounted the steps, and, passing rapidly through the hall, went up-stairs. Alicia Drake

and Lankester followed, pausing in the hall to talk with Bobbie.

Alicia too looked tired out. She was dressed in a marvellous gown of white chiffon, adorned with a large rosette of Marsham's colors—red-and-yellow—and wore a hat entirely composed of red and yellow roses. The colors were not becoming to her, and she had no air of happy triumph. Rather, both in her and in Marsham there were strong signs of suppressed chagrin and indignation.

"Well, that's over!" said Miss Drake, throwing down her gloves on the billiard-table with a fierce gesture; "and I'm sure neither Oliver nor I would go through it again for a million of money. How *revolting* the lower classes are!"

Lankester looked at her curiously.

"You've worked awfully hard," he said. "I hope you're going to have a good rest."

"I wouldn't bother about rest if I could pay out some of the people here," said Alicia, passionately. "I should like to see a few score of them hanged in chains, *pour encourager les autres*."

So saying, she gathered up her gloves and parasol, and swept up-stairs declaring that she was too dog-tired to talk.

Bobbie Forbes and Lankester looked at each other.

"It's been really a beastly business!" said Lankester, under his breath. "Precious little politics in it, too, as far as I could see. The strong Ferrierites no doubt have held aloof on the score of Marsham's supposed disloyalty to the great man; though, as far as I can make out, he has been careful not to go beyond a certain line in his speeches. Anyway, they have done no work, and a good

many of them have certainly abstained from voting. It is our vote that has gone down; the Tories have scarcely increased theirs at all. But the other side—and the Socialists—got hold of a lot of nasty little things about the estate and the collieries. The collieries are practically in rebellion, spoiling for a big strike next November, if not before. When Miss Drake and Marsham drove round there this morning they were very badly received. Her parasol was broken by a stone, and there was a good deal of mud-throwing."

Bobbie eyed his companion.

"Was any of the Opposition personal to *her?*"

Lankester nodded.

"There's an extraordinary feeling all over the place for—"

"Of course there is!" said Bobbie, hotly. "Marsham isn't such a fool as not to know that. Why did he let this aggressive young woman take such a prominent part?"

Lankester shrugged his shoulders, but did not pursue the subject. The two men went up-stairs, and Lankester parted from his companion with the remark:

"I must say I hope Marsham won't press for anything in the Government. I don't believe he'll ever get in for this place again."

Forbes shook his head.

"Marsham's got a lot of devil in him somewhere. I shouldn't wonder if this made him set his teeth."

Lankester opened the door of the ugly yet luxurious room which had been assigned him. He looked round it with fresh distaste, resenting its unnecessary size and its pretentious decoration, resenting also the very care-

ful valeting which had evidently been bestowed on his shabby clothes and personal appointments, as though the magnificent young footman who looked after him had been doing his painful best with impossible materials.

"Why, the idiots have shut the windows!"

He strode vehemently across the floor, only to find the park outside, as he hung across the sill, even less to his liking than the room within.

Then, throwing himself into a chair, tired out with the canvassing, speaking, and multifarious business of the preceding days, he fell to wondering what on earth had made him—after the fatigues of his own election—come down to help Marsham with his. There were scores of men in the House he liked a great deal better, and requests for help had been showered upon him.

He had, no doubt, been anxious, as a keen member of the advanced group, that Marsham should finally commit himself to the programme of the Left Wing, with which he had been so long coquetting. Oliver had a considerable position in the House, and was, moreover, a rich man. Rich men had not, so far, been common in the advanced section of the party. Lankester, in whom the idealist and the wire-puller were shrewdly mixed, was well aware that the reforms he desired could only be got by extensive organization; and he knew precisely what the money cost of getting them would be. Rich men, therefore, were the indispensable tools of his ideas; and among his own group he who had never possessed a farthing of his own apart from the earnings of his brain and pen was generally set on to capture them.

Was that really why he had come down?—to make sure of this rich Laodicean? Lankester fell into a reverie.

He was a man of curious gifts and double personality. It was generally impossible to lure him, on any pretext, from the East End and the House of Commons. He lived in a block of model dwellings in a street opening out of the East India Dock Road, and his rooms, whenever he was at home, were overrun by children from the neighboring tenements. To them he was all gentleness and fun, while his command of invective in a public meeting was little short of terrible. Great ladies and the country-houses courted him because of a certain wit, a certain charm—above all, a certain spiritual power—which piqued the worldling. He flouted and refused the great ladies—with a smile, however, which gave no offence; and he knew, notwithstanding, everybody whom he wanted to know. Occasionally he made quiet spaces in his life, and disappeared from London for days or weeks. When he reappeared it was often with a battered and exhausted air, as of one from whom virtue had gone out. He was, in truth, a mystic of a secular kind: very difficult to class religiously, though he called himself a member of the Society of Friends. Lady Lucy, who was of Quaker extraction, recognized in his ways and phrases echoes from the meetings and influences of her youth. But, in reality, he was self-taught and self-formed, on the lines of an Evangelical tradition, which had owed something, a couple of generations back, among his Danish forebears, to the influence of Emanuel Swedenborg. This tradition had not only been conveyed to him by a beloved and saintly mother; it had been appropriated by the man's inmost forces. What he believed in, with all mystics, was *prayer*—an intimate and ineffable communion between the heart and God. Lying half asleep on the House of Commons benches, or strolling on the Terrace,

he pursued often an inner existence, from which he could spring in a moment to full mundane life—arguing passionately for some Socialist proposal, scathing an opponent, or laughing and "ragging" with a group of friends, like a school-boy on an *exeat*. But whatever he did, an atmosphere went with him that made him beloved. He was extremely poor, and wrote for his living. His opinions won the scorn of moderate men; and every year his influence in Parliament—on both sides of the House and with the Labor party—increased. On his rare appearance in such houses as Tallyn Hall every servant in the house marked and befriended him. The tall footman, for instance, who had just been endeavoring to make the threadbare cuffs of Lankester's dress coat present a more decent appearance, had done it in no spirit of patronage, but simply in order that a gentleman who spoke to him as a man and a brother should not go at a disadvantage among "toffs" who did nothing of the kind.

But again—why had he come down?

During the last months of Parliament, Lankester had seen a good deal of Oliver. The story of Diana, and of Marsham's interrupted wooing was by that time public property, probably owing to the indignation of certain persons in Brookshire. As we have seen, it had injured the prestige of the man concerned in and out of Parliament. But Lankester, who looked at life intimately and intensely, with the eye of a confessor, had been roused by it to a curiosity about Oliver Marsham—whom at the time he was meeting habitually on political affairs—which he had never felt before. He, with his brooding second sight based on a spiritual estimate of the world—he and Lady Lucy—alone saw that Marsham was

unhappy. His irritable moodiness might, of course, have nothing to do with his failure to play the man in the case of Miss Mallory. Lankester was inclined to think it had —Alicia Drake or no Alicia Drake. And the grace of repentance is so rare in mankind that the mystic—his own secret life wavering perpetually between repentance and ecstasy—is drawn to the merest shadow of it.

These hidden thoughts on Lankester's side had been met by a new and tacit friendliness on Marsham's. He had shown an increasing liking for Lankester's company, and had finally asked him to come down and help him in his constituency.

By George, if he married that girl, he would pay his penalty to the utmost!

Lankester leaned out of window again, his eyes sweeping the dreary park. In reality they had before them Marsham's aspect at the declaration of the poll—head and face thrown back defiantly, hollow eyes of bitterness and fatigue; and the scene outside—in front, a booing crowd—and beside the new member, Alicia's angry and insolent look.

The election represented a set-back in a man's career, in spite of the bare victory. And Lankester did not think it would be retrieved. With a prophetic insight which seldom failed him, he saw that Marsham's chapter of success was closed. He might get some small office out of the Government. Nevertheless, the scale of life had dropped—on the wrong side. Through Lankester's thought there shot a pang of sympathy. Defeat was always more winning to him than triumph.

Meanwhile the new member himself was in no melting mood.

Forbes was right. Marsham, in his room, looking over the letters which his servant had brought him, was only conscious of two feelings—disgust and loathing with regard to the contest just over, and a dogged determination with regard to the future. He had been deserted by the moderates—by the Ferrierites—in spite of all his endeavors to keep within courteous and judicial bounds; and he had been all but sacrificed to a forbearance which had not saved him apparently a single moderate vote, and had lost him scores on the advanced side.

With regard to Ferrier personally, he was extremely sore. A letter from him during the preceding week would certainly have influenced votes. Marsham denied hotly that his speeches had been of a character to offend or injure his old friend and leader. A man must really be allowed some honest latitude of opinion, even under party government!—and in circumstances of personal obligation. He had had to steer a most difficult course. But why must he give up his principles—not to speak of his chances of political advancement—because John Ferrier had originally procured him his seat in Parliament, and had been his parents' intimate friend for many years? Let the Whig deserters answer that question, if they could!

His whole being was tingling with anger and resentment. The contest had steeped him in humiliations which stuck to him like mud-stains.

The week before, he had written to Ferrier, imploring him if possible to come and speak for him—or at least to write a letter; humbling his pride; and giving elaborate explanations of the line which he had taken.

There, on the table beside him, was Ferrier's reply:

"My dear Oliver,—I don't think a letter would do you much good, and for a speech, I am too tired—and I am afraid at the present moment too thin-skinned. Pray excuse me. We shall meet when this hubbub is over. All success to you.

"Yours ever, J. F."

Was there ever a more ungracious, a more uncalled-for, letter? Well, at any rate, he was free henceforward to think and act for himself, and on public grounds only; though of course he would do nothing unworthy of an old friendship, or calculated to hurt his mother's feelings. Ferrier, by this letter, and by the strong negative influence he must have exerted in West Brookshire during the election, had himself loosened the old bond; and Marsham would henceforth stand on his own feet.

As to Ferrier's reasons for a course of action so wholly unlike any he had ever yet taken in the case of Lucy Marsham's son, Oliver's thoughts found themselves engaged in a sore and perpetual wrangle. Ferrier, he supposed, suspected him of a lack of "straightness"; and did not care to maintain an intimate relation, which had been already, and might be again, used against him. Marsham, on his side, recalled with discomfort various small incidents in the House of Commons which might have seemed—to an enemy—to illustrate or confirm such an explanation of the state of things.

Absurd, of course! He *was* an old friend of Ferrier's, whose relation to his mother necessarily involved close and frequent contact with her son. And at the same time—although in the past Ferrier had no doubt laid him under great personal and political obligations—he had by now, in the natural course of things, developed strong opinions of his own, especially as to the conduct of party affairs in the House of Commons; opinions which were

not Ferrier's—which were, indeed, vehemently opposed to Ferrier's. In his, Oliver's, opinion, Ferrier's lead in the House—on certain questions—was a lead of weakness, making for disaster. Was he not even to hold, much less to express such a view, because of the quasi-parental relation in which Ferrier had once stood to him? The whole thing was an odious confusion—most unfair to him individually—between personal and Parliamentary duty.

Frankness?—loyalty? It would, no doubt, be said that Ferrier had always behaved with singular generosity both toward opponents and toward dissidents in his own party. Open and serious argument was at no time unwelcome to him.

All very well! But how was one to argue, beyond a certain point, with a man twenty-five years your senior, who had known you in jackets, and was also your political chief?

Moreover, he had argued—to the best of his ability. Ferrier had written him a striking series of letters, no doubt, and he had replied to them. As to Ferrier's wish that he should communicate certain points in those letters to Barton and Lankester, he had done it, to some extent. But it was a most useless proceeding. The arguments employed had been considered and rejected a hundred times already by every member of the dissident group.

And with regard to the meeting, which had apparently roused so sharp a resentment in Ferrier, Marsham maintained simply that he was not responsible. It was a meeting of the advanced Radicals of the division. Neither Marsham nor his agents had been present. Certain remarks and opinions of his own had been quoted indeed, even in public, as leading up to it, and justifying it.

A great mistake. He had never meant to countenance any personal attack on Ferrier or his leadership. Yet he uncomfortably admitted that the meeting had told badly on the election. In the view of one side, he had not had pluck enough to go to it; in the view of the other, he had disgracefully connived at it.

The arrival of the evening post and papers did something to brush away these dismal self-communings. Wonderful news from the counties! The success of the latest batch of advanced candidates had been astonishing. Other men, it seemed, had been free to liberate their souls! Well, now the arbiter of the situation was Lord Philip, and there would certainly be a strong advanced infusion in the new Ministry. Marsham considered that he had as good claims as any of the younger men; and if it came to another election in Brookshire, hateful as the prospect was, he should be fighting in the open, and choosing his own weapons. No shirking! His whole being gathered itself into a passionate determination to retaliate upon the persons who had injured, thwarted, and calumniated him during the contest just over. He would fight again—next week, if necessary—and he would win!

As to the particular and personal calumnies with which he had been assailed—why, of course, he absolved Diana. She could have had no hand in them.

Suddenly he pushed his papers from him with a hasty unconscious movement.

In driving home that evening past the gates and plantations of Beechcote it seemed to him that he had seen through the trees—in the distance—the fluttering of a white dress. Had the news of his inglorious success

just reached her? How had she received it? Her face came before him—the frank eyes—the sweet troubled look.

He dropped his head upon his arms. A sick distaste for all that he had been doing and thinking rose upon him, wavelike, drowning for a moment the energies of mind and will. Had anything been worth while—for *him*—since the day when he had failed to keep the last tryst which Diana had offered him?

He did not, however, long allow himself a weakness which he knew well he had no right to indulge. He roused himself abruptly, took pen and paper, and wrote a little note to Alicia, sending it round to her through her maid.

Marsham pleaded fatigue, and dined in his room. In the course of the meal he inquired of his servant if Mr. Barrington had arrived.

"Yes, sir; he arrived in time for dinner."

"Ask him to come up afterward and see me here."

As he awaited the new-comer, Marsham had time to ponder what this visit of a self-invited guest might mean. The support of the *Herald* and its brilliant editor had been so far one of Ferrier's chief assets. But there had been some signs of wavering in its columns lately, especially on two important questions likely to occupy the new Ministry in its first session—matters on which the opinion of the Darcy, or advanced section, was understood to be in violent conflict with that of Ferrier and the senior members of the late Front Opposition Bench in general.

Barrington, no doubt, wished to pump him—one of Ferrier's intimates—with regard to the latest phase of

Ferrier's views on these two principal measures. The leader himself was rather stiff and old-fashioned with regard to journalists—gave too little information where other men gave too much.

Oliver glanced in some disquiet at the pile of Ferrier's letters lying beside him. It contained material for which any ambitious journalist, at the present juncture, would give the eyes out of his head. But could Barrington be trusted? Oliver vaguely remembered some stories to his disadvantage, told probably by Lankester, who in these respects was one of the most scrupulous of men. Yet the paper stood high, and was certainly written with conspicuous ability.

Why not give him information?—cautiously, of course, and with discretion. What harm could it do—to Ferrier or any one else? The party was torn by dissensions; and the first and most necessary step toward reunion was that Ferrier's aims and methods should be thoroughly understood. No doubt in these letters, as he had himself pointed out, he had expressed himself with complete, even dangerous freedom. But there was not going to be any question of putting them into Barrington's hands. Certainly not!—merely a quotation—a reference here and there.

As he began to sketch his own share in the expected conversation, a pleasant feeling of self-importance crept in, soothing to the wounds of the preceding week. Secretly Marsham knew that he had never yet made the mark in politics that he had hoped to make, that his abilities entitled him to make. The more he thought of it the more he realized that the coming half-hour might be of great significance in English politics; he had it in his own power to make it so. He was conscious of

a strong wish to impress Barrington—perhaps Ferrier also. After all, a man grows up, and does not remain an Eton boy, or an undergraduate, forever. It would be well to make Ferrier more aware than he was of that fact.

In the midst of his thoughts the door opened, and Barrington—a man showing in his dark-skinned, large-featured alertness the signs of Jewish pliancy and intelligence—walked in.

"Are you up to conversation?" he said, laughing. "You look pretty done!"

"If I can whisper you what you want," said Oliver, huskily, "it's at your service! There are the cigarettes."

The talk lasted long. Midnight was near before the two men separated.

The news of Marsham's election reached Ferrier under Sir James Chide's roof, in the pleasant furnished house about four miles from Beechcote, of which he had lately become the tenant in order to be near Diana. It was conveyed in a letter from Lady Lucy, of which the conclusion ran as follows:

"It is so strange not to have you here this evening—not to be able to talk over with you all these anxieties and trials. I can't help being a little angry with Sir James. We are the oldest friends.

"Of course I have often been anxious lately lest Oliver should have done anything to offend you. I have spoken to him about that tiresome meeting, and I think I could prove to you it was *not* his fault. Do, my dear friend, come here as soon as you can, and let me explain to you whatever may have seemed wrong. You cannot think how much we miss you. I feel it a little hard that there should be strangers here this evening — like Mr. Lankester and Mr. Barrington. But it could not be helped. Mr Lankester was speaking for Oliver last night—and Mr. Barring-

ton invited himself. I really don't know why. Oliver is dreadfully tired — and so am I. The ingratitude and ill-feeling of many of our neighbors has tried me sorely. It will be a long time before I forget it. It really seems as though nothing were worth striving for in this very difficult world."

"Poor Lucy!" said Ferrier to himself, his heart softening, as usual. "Barrington? H'm. That's odd."

He had only time for a short reply:

"My dear Lady Lucy,—It's horrid that you are tired and depressed. I wish I could come and cheer you up. Politics are a cursed trade. But never mind, Oliver is safely in, and as soon as the Government is formed, I will come to Tallyn, and we will laugh at these woes. I can't write at greater length now, for Broadstone has just summoned me. You will have seen that he went to Windsor this morning. Now the agony begins. Let's hope it may be decently short. I am just off for town.

"Yours ever, John Ferrier."

Two days passed—three days—and still the "agony" lasted. Lord Broadstone's house in Portman Square was besieged all day by anxious journalists watching the goings and comings of a Cabinet in the making. But nothing could be communicated to the newspapers—nothing, in fact, was settled. Envoys went backward and forward to Lord Philip in Northamptonshire. Urgent telegrams invited him to London. He took no notice of the telegrams; he did not invite the envoys, and when they came he had little or nothing of interest to say to them. Lord Broadstone, he declared, was fully in possession of his views. He had nothing more to add. And, indeed, a short note from him laid by in the new Premier's pocket-book was, if the truth were known, the *fons et origo* of all Lord Broadstone's difficulties.

Meanwhile the more conservative section exerted itself, and by the evening of the third day it seemed to have triumphed. A rumor spread abroad that Lord Philip had gone too far. Ferrier emerged from a long colloquy with the Prime Minister, walking briskly across the square with his secretary, smiling at some of the reporters in waiting. Twenty minutes later, as he stood in the smoking-room of the Reform, surrounded by a few privileged friends, Lankester passed through the room.

"By Jove," he said to a friend with him, "I believe Ferrier's done the trick!"

In spite, however, of a contented mind, Ferrier was aware, on reaching his own house, that he was far from well. There was nothing very much to account for his feeling of illness. A slight pain across the chest, a slight feeling of faintness, when he came to count up his symptoms; nothing else appeared. It was a glorious summer evening. He determined to go back to Chide, who now always returned to Lytchett by an evening train, after a working-day in town. Accordingly, the new Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the House dined lightly, and went off to St. Pancras, leaving a note for the Prime Minister to say where he was to be found, and promising to come to town again the following afternoon.

The following morning fulfilled the promise of the tranquil evening and starry night, which, amid the deep quiet of the country, had done much to refresh a man, in whom, indeed, a stimulating consciousness of success seemed already to have repaired the ravages of the fight.

Ferrier was always an early riser, and by nine o'clock he and Sir James were pottering and smoking in the garden. A long case in which Chide had been engaged had come to an end the preceding day. The great lawyer sent word to his chambers that he was not coming up to town; Ferrier ascertained that he was only half an hour from a telegraph office, made a special arrangement with the local post as to a mid-day delivery of letters, and then gave himself up for the morning to rest, gossip, and a walk.

By a tiresome *contretemps* the newspapers did not arrive at breakfast-time. Sir James was but a new-comer in the district, and the parcel of papers due to him had gone astray through the stupidity of a newsboy. A servant was sent into Dunscombe, five miles off; and meanwhile Ferrier bore the blunder with equanimity. His letters of the morning, fresh from the heart of things, made newspapers a mere superfluity. They could tell him nothing that he did not know already. And as for opinions, those might wait.

He proposed, indeed, before the return of the servant from Dunscombe, to walk over to Beechcote. The road lay through woods, two miles of shade. He pined for exercise; Diana and her young sympathy acted as a magnet both on him and on Sir James; and it was to be presumed she took a daily paper, being, as Ferrier recalled, "a terrible little Tory."

In less than an hour they were at Beechcote. They found Diana and Mrs. Colwood on the lawn of the old house, reading and working in the shade of a yew hedge planted by that Topham Beauclerk who was a friend of Johnson. The scent of roses and limes; the hum of bees; the beauty of slow-sailing clouds, and of the shad-

ows they flung on the mellowed color of the house; combined with the figure of Diana in white, her eager eyes, her smile, and her unquenchable interest in all that concerned the two friends, of whose devotion to her she was so gratefully and simply proud—these things put the last touch to Ferrier's enjoyment. He flung himself on the grass, talking to both the ladies of the incidents and absurdities of Cabinet-making, with a freedom and fun, an abandonment of anxiety and care that made him young again. Nobody mentioned a newspaper.

Presently Chide, who had now taken the part of general adviser to Diana, which had once been filled by Marsham, strolled off with her to look at a greenhouse in need of repairs. Mrs. Colwood was called in by some household matter. Ferrier was left alone.

As usual, he had a book in his pocket. This time it was a volume of selected essays, ranging from Bacon to Carlyle. He began lazily to turn the pages, smiling to himself the while at the paradoxes of life. Here, for an hour, he sat under the limes, drunk with summer breezes and scents, toying with a book, as though he were some "indolent irresponsible reviewer"—some college fellow in vacation—some wooer of an idle muse. Yet dusk that evening would find him once more in the Babel of London. And before him lay the most strenuous, and, as he hoped, the most fruitful passage of his political life. Broadstone, too, was an old man; the Premiership itself could not be far away.

As for Lord Philip—Ferrier's thoughts ran upon that gentleman with a good-humor which was not without malice. He had played his cards extremely well, but the trumps in his hand had not been quite strong enough. Well, he was young; plenty of time yet for Cabinet office.

That he would be a thorn in the side of the new Ministry went without saying. Ferrier felt no particular dismay at the prospect, and amused himself with speculations on the letters which had probably passed that very day between Broadstone and the "iratus Achilles" in Northamptonshire.

And from Lord Philip, Ferrier's thoughts—shrewdly indulgent — strayed to the other conspirators, and to Oliver Marsham in particular, their spokesman and intermediary. Suddenly a great softness invaded him toward Oliver and his mother. After all, had he not been hard with the boy, to leave him to his fight without a word of help? Oliver's ways were irritating; he had more than one of the intriguer's gifts; and several times during the preceding weeks Ferrier's mind had recurred with disquiet to the letters in his hands. But, after all, things had worked out better than could possibly have been expected. The *Herald*, in particular, had done splendid service, to himself personally, and to the moderates in general. Now was the time for amnesty and reconciliation all round. Ferrier's mind ran busily on schemes of the kind. As to Oliver, he had already spoken to Broadstone about him, and would speak again that night. Certainly he must have something—a Junior Lordship at least. And if he were opposed on re-election, why, he should be helped—roundly helped. Ferrier already saw himself at Tallyn once more, with Lady Lucy's frail hand in one of his, the other perhaps on Oliver's shoulder. After all, where was he happy—or nearly happy—but with them?

His eyes returned to his book. With a mild amusement he saw that it had opened of itself at an essay,

by Abraham Cowley, on "Greatness" and its penalties: "Out of these inconveniences arises naturally one more, which is, that no greatness can be satisfied or contented with itself; still, if it could mount up a little higher, it would be happy; if it could not gain that point, it would obtain all its desires; but yet at last, when it is got up to the very top of the peak of Teneriffe, it is in very great danger of breaking its neck downward, but in no possibility of ascending upward — into the seat of tranquillity about the moon."

The new Secretary of State threw himself back in his garden chair, his hands behind his head. Cowley wrote well; but the old fellow did not, after all, know much about it, in spite of his boasted experiences at that sham and musty court of St.-Germain's. Is it true that men who have climbed high are always thirsty to climb higher? No! "What is my feeling now? Simply a sense of *opportunity*. A man may be glad to have the chance of leaving his mark on England."

Thoughts rose in him which were not those of a pessimist—thoughts, however, which the wise man will express as little as possible, since talk profanes them. The concluding words of Peel's great Corn Law speech ran through his memory, and thrilled it. He was accused of indifference to the lot of the poor. It was not true. It never had been true.

"Hullo! who comes?"

Mrs. Colwood was running over the lawn, bringing apparently a letter, and a newspaper.

She came up, a little breathless.

"This letter has just come for you, Mr. Ferrier, by special messenger. And Miss Mallory asked me to bring you the newspaper."

Ferrier took the letter, which was bulky and addressed in the Premier's handwriting.

"Kindly ask the messenger to wait. I will come and speak to him."

He opened the letter and read it. Then, having put it deliberately in his pocket, he sat bending forward, staring at the grass. The newspaper caught his eye. It was the *Herald* of that morning. He raised it from the ground, read the first leading article, and then a column "from a correspondent" on which the article was based.

As he came to the end of it a strange premonition took possession of him. He was still himself, but it seemed to him that the roar of some approaching cataract was in his ears. He mastered himself with difficulty, took a pencil from his pocket, and drew a wavering line beside a passage in the article contributed by the *Herald's* correspondent. The newspaper slid from his knee to the ground.

Then, with a groping hand, he sought again for Broadstone's letter, drew it out of its envelope, and, with a mist before his eyes, felt for the last page which, he seemed to remember, was blank. On this he traced, with difficulty, a few lines, replaced the whole letter in the torn envelope and wrote an address upon it—uncertainly crossing out his own name.

Then, suddenly, he fell back. The letter followed the newspaper to the ground. Deadly weakness was creeping upon him, but as yet the brain was clear. Only his will struggled no more; everything had given way, but with the sense of utter catastrophe there mingled neither pain nor bitterness. Some of the Latin verse scattered over the essay he had been reading ran vaguely through

his mind—then phrases from his last talk with the Prime Minister—then remembrances of the night at Assisi—and the face of the poet—

A piercing cry rang out close beside him—Diana's cry. His life made a last rally, and his eyes opened. They closed again, and he heard no more.

Sir James Chide stooped over Diana.

"Run for help!—brandy!—a doctor! I'll stay with him. Run!"

Diana ran. She met Mrs. Colwood hurrying, and sent her for brandy. She herself sped on blindly toward the village.

A few yards beyond the Beechcote gate she was overtaken by a carriage. There was an exclamation, the carriage pulled up sharp, and a man leaped from it.

"Miss Mallory!—what is the matter?"

She looked up, saw Oliver Marsham, and, in the carriage behind him, Lady Lucy, sitting stiff and pale, with astonished eyes.

"Mr. Ferrier is ill—very ill! Please go for the doctor! He is here—at my house."

The figure in the carriage rose hurriedly. Lady Lucy was beside her.

"What is the matter?" She laid an imperious hand on the girl's arm.

"I think—he is dying," said Diana, gasping. "Oh, come!—come back at once!"

Marsham was already in the carriage. The horse galloped forward. Diana and Lady Lucy ran toward the house.

"In the garden," said Diana, breathlessly; and, taking Lady Lucy's hand, she guided her.

Beside the dying man stood Sir James Chide, Muriel

Colwood, and the old butler. Sir James looked up, started at the sight of Lady Lucy, and went to meet her.

"You are just in time," he said, tenderly; "but he is going fast. We have done all we could."

Ferrier was now lying on the grass, his head supported. Lady Lucy sank beside him.

"John!" she called, in a voice of anguish—"John—dear, dear friend!"

But the dying man made no sign. And as she lifted his hand to her lips—the love she had shown him so grudgingly in life speaking now undisguised through her tears and her despair—Sir James watched the gentle passage of the last breaths, and knew that all was done—the play over and the lights out.

CHAPTER XIX

A SAD hurrying and murmuring filled the old rooms and passages of Beechcote. The village doctor had arrived, and under his direction the body of John Ferrier had been removed from the garden to the library of the house. There, amid Diana's books and pictures, Ferrier lay, shut-eyed and serene, that touch of the ugly and the ponderous which in life had mingled with the power and humanity of his aspect entirely lost and drowned in the dignity of death.

Chide and the doctor were in low-voiced consultation at one end of the room; Lady Lucy sat beside the body, her face buried in her hands; Marsham stood behind her.

Brown, the butler, noiselessly entered the room, and approached Chide.

"Please sir, Lord Broadstone's messenger is here. He thinks you might wish him to take back a letter to his lordship."

Chide turned abruptly.

"Lord Broadstone's messenger?"

"He brought a letter for Mr. Ferrier, sir, half an hour ago."

Chide's face changed.

"Where is the letter?" He turned to the doctor, who shook his head.

"I saw nothing when we brought him in."

Marsham, who had overheard the conversation, came forward.

"Perhaps on the grass—"

Chide—pale, with drawn brows—looked at him a moment in silence.

Marsham hurried to the garden and to the spot under the yews, where the death had taken place. Round the garden chairs were signs of trampling feet—the feet of the gardeners who had carried the body. A medley of books, opened letters, and working-materials lay on the grass. Marsham looked through them; they all belonged to Diana or Mrs. Colwood. Then he noticed a cushion which had fallen beside the chair, and a corner of newspaper peeping from below it. He lifted it up.

Below lay Broadstone's open letter, in its envelope, addressed first in the Premier's well-known handwriting to "The Right Honble. John Ferrier, M.P."—and, secondly, in wavering pencil, to "Lady Lucy Marsham, Tallyn Hall."

Marsham turned the letter over, while thoughts hurried through his brain. Evidently Ferrier had had time to read it. Why that address to his mother?—and in that painful hand—written, it seemed, with the weakness of death already upon him?

The newspaper? Ah!—the *Herald!*—lying as though, after reading it, Ferrier had thrown it down and let the letter drop upon it, from a hand that had ceased to obey him. As Marsham saw it the color rushed into his cheeks. He stooped and raised it. Suddenly he noticed on the margin of the paper a pencilled line, faint and wavering, like the words written on the envelope. It ran beside a passage in the article "from a correspondent," and as he looked at it consciousness and

pulse paused in dismay. There, under his eye, in that dim mark, was the last word and sign of John Ferrier.

He was still staring at it when a sound disturbed him. Lady Lucy came to him, feebly, across the grass. Marsham dropped the newspaper, retaining Broadstone's letter.

"Sir James wished me to leave him a little," she said, brokenly. "The ambulance will be here directly. They will take him to Lytchett. I thought it should have been Tallyn. But Sir James decided it."

"Mother!"—Marsham moved toward her, reluctantly —"here is a letter—no doubt of importance. And—it is addressed to you."

Lady Lucy gave a little cry. She looked at the pencilled address, with quivering lips; then she opened the envelope, and on the back of the closely written letter she saw at once Ferrier's last words to her.

Marsham, moved by a son's natural impulse, stooped and kissed her hair. He drew a chair forward, and she sank into it with the letter. While she was reading it he raised the *Herald* again, unobserved, folded it up hurriedly, and put it in his pocket; then walked away a few steps, that he might leave his mother to her grief. Presently Lady Lucy called him.

"Oliver!" The voice was strong. He went back to her and she received him with sparkling eyes, her hand on Broadstone's letter.

"Oliver, this is what killed him! Lord Broadstone must bear the responsibility."

And hurriedly, incoherently, she explained that the letter from Lord Broadstone was an urgent appeal to Ferrier's patriotism and to his personal friendship for the writer; begging him for the sake of party unity, and

for the sake of the country, to allow the Prime Minister to cancel the agreement of the day before; to accept a peerage and the War Office in lieu of the Exchequer and the leadership of the House. The Premier gave a full account of the insurmountable difficulties in the way of the completion of the Government, which had disclosed themselves during the course of the afternoon and evening following his interview with Ferrier. Refusals of the most unexpected kind, from the most unlikely quarters; letters and visits of protest from persons impossible to ignore--most of them, no doubt, engineered by Lord Philip; "finally the newspapers of this morning—especially the article in the *Herald*, which you will have seen before this reaches you—all these, taken together, convince me that if I cannot persuade you to see the matter in the same light as I do—and I know well that, whether you accept or refuse, you will put the public advantage first — I must at once inform her Majesty that my attempt to construct a Government has broken down."

Marsham followed her version of the letter as well as he could; and as she turned the last page, he too perceived the pencilled writing, which was not Broadstone's. This she did not offer to communicate; indeed, she covered it at once with her hand.

"Yes, I suppose it was the shock," he said, in a low voice. "But it was not Broadstone's fault. It was no one's fault."

Lady Lucy flushed and looked up.

"That man Barrington!" she said, vehemently. "Oh, if I had never had him in my house!"

Oliver made no reply. He sat beside her, staring at the grass. Suddenly Lady Lucy touched him on the knee.

"Oliver!"—her voice was gasping and difficult—"Oliver!—you had nothing to do with that?"

"With what, mother?"

"With the *Herald* article. I read it this morning. But I laughed at it! John's letter arrived at the same moment—so happy, so full of plans—"

"Mother!—you don't imagine that a man in Ferrier's position can be upset by an article in a newspaper?"

"I don't know—the *Herald* was so important—I have heard John say so. Oliver!"—her face worked painfully—"I know you talked with that man that night. You didn't—"

"I didn't say anything of which I am ashamed," he said, sharply, raising his head.

His mother looked at him in silence. Their eyes met in a flash of strange antagonism—as though each accused the other.

A sound behind them made Lady Lucy turn round. Brown was coming over the grass.

"A telegram, sir, for you. Your coachman stopped the boy and sent him here."

Marsham opened it hastily. As he read it his gray and haggard face flushed again heavily.

"Awful news just reached me. Deepest sympathy with you and yours. Should be grateful if I might see you to-day.

"Broadstone."

He handed it to his mother, but Lady Lucy scarcely took in the sense of it. When he left her to write his answer, she sat on in the July sun which had now reached the chairs, mechanically drawing her large country hat forward to shield her from its glare—a forlorn figure, with staring absent eyes; every detail of her sharp slen-

derness, her blanched and quivering face, the elegance of her black dress, the diamond fastening the black lace hat-strings tied under her pointed chin—set in the full and searching illumination of mid-day. It showed her an old woman—left alone.

Her whole being rebelled against what had happened to her. Life without John's letters, John's homage, John's sympathy — how was it to be endured? Disguises that shrouded her habitual feelings and instincts even from herself dropped away. That Oliver was left to her did not make up to her in the least for John's death.

The smart that held her in its grip was a new experience. She had never felt it at the death of the imperious husband, to whom she had been, nevertheless, decorously attached. Her thoughts clung to those last broken words under her hand, trying to wring from them something that might content and comfort her remorse:

"Dear Lucy,—I feel ill—it may be nothing—Chide and you may read this letter. Broadstone couldn't help it. Tell him so. Bless you— Tell Oliver— Yours, J. F."

The greater part of the letter was all but illegible even by her—but the "bless you" and the "J. F." were more firmly written than the rest, as though the failing hand had made a last effort.

Her spiritual vanity was hungry and miserable. Surely, though she would not be his wife, she had been John's best friend!—his good angel. Her heart clamored for some warmer, gratefuller word—that might justify her to herself. And, instead, she realized for the first time the desert she had herself created, the loneliness she had herself imposed. And with prophetic terror she

saw in front of her the daily self-reproach that her self-esteem might not be able to kill.

"*Tell Oliver—*"

Did it mean "if I die, tell Oliver"? But John never said anything futile or superfluous in his life. Was it not rather the beginning of some last word to Oliver that he could not finish? Oh, if her son had indeed contributed to his death!

She shivered under the thought; hurrying recollections of Mr. Barrington's visit, of the *Herald* article of that morning, of Oliver's speeches and doings during the preceding month, rushing through her mind. She had already expressed her indignation about the *Herald* article to Oliver that morning, on the drive which had been so tragically interrupted.

"Dear Lady Lucy!"

She looked up. Sir James Chide stood beside her.

The first thing he did was to draw her to her feet, and then to move her chair into the shade.

"You have lost more than any of us," he said, as she sank back into it, and, holding out his hand, he took hers into his warm compassionate clasp. He had never thought that she behaved well to Ferrier, and he knew that she had behaved vilely to Diana; but his heart melted within him at the sight of a woman—and a gray-haired woman—in grief.

"I hear you found Broadstone's letter?" He glanced at it on her lap. "I too have heard from him. The messenger, as soon as he knew I was here, produced a letter for me that he was to have taken on to Lytchett. It is a nice letter—a very nice letter, as far as that goes. Broadstone wanted me to use my influence—with John—described his difficulties—"

Chide's hand suddenly clinched on his knee.

"—If I could only get at that creature, Lord Philip!"

"You think it was the shock — killed him?" The hard slow tears had begun again to drop upon her dress.

"Oh! he has been an ill man since May," said Chide, evasively. "No doubt there has been heart mischief—unsuspected—for a long time. The doctors will know—presently. Poor Broadstone! — it will nearly kill him too."

She held out the letter to him.

"You are to read it;" and then, in broken tones, pointing: "look! he said so."

He started as he saw the writing on the back, and again his hand pressed hers kindly.

"He felt ill," she said, brokenly; "he foresaw it. Those are his last words—his precious last words."

She hid her face. As Chide gave it back to her, his brow and lip had settled into the look which made him so formidable in court. He looked round him abruptly.

"Where is the *Herald?* I hear Mrs. Colwood brought it out."

He searched the grass in vain, and the chairs. Lady Lucy was silent. Presently she rose feebly.

"When—when will they take him away?"

"Directly. The ambulance is coming—I shall go with him. Take my arm." She leaned on him heavily, and as they approached the house they saw two figures step out of it—Marsham and Diana.

Diana came quickly, in her light white dress. Her eyes were red, but she was quite composed. Chide looked at her with tenderness. In the two hours which had passed since the tragedy she had been the help and the support of everybody, writing, giving directions,

making arrangements, under his own guidance, while keeping herself entirely in the background. No parade of grief, no interference with himself or the doctors; but once, as he sat by the body in the darkened room, he was conscious of her coming in, of her kneeling for a little while at the dead man's side, of her soft, stifled weeping. He had not said a word to her, nor she to him. They understood each other.

And now she came, with this wistful face, to Lady Lucy. She stood between that lady and Marsham, in her own garden, without, as it seemed to Sir James, a thought of herself. As for him, in the midst of his own sharp grief, he could not help looking covertly from one to the other, remembering that February scene in Lady Lucy's drawing-room. And presently he was sure that Lady Lucy too remembered it. Diana timidly begged that she would take some food—some milk or wine—before her drive home. It was three hours—incredible as it seemed—since she had called to them in the road. Lady Lucy, looking at her, and evidently but half conscious—at first—of what was said, suddenly colored, and refused—courteously but decidedly.

"Thank you. I want nothing. I shall soon be home. Oliver!"

"I go to Lytchett with Sir James, mother. Miss Mallory begs that you will let Mrs. Colwood take you home."

"It is very kind, but I prefer to go alone. Is my carriage there?"

She spoke like the stately shadow of her normal self. The carriage was waiting. Lady Lucy approached Sir James, who was standing apart, and murmured something in his ear, to the effect that she would come to

Lytchett that evening, and would bring flowers. "Let mine be the first," she said, inaudibly to the rest. Sir James assented. Such observances, he supposed, count for a great deal with women; especially with those who are conscious of having trifled a little with the weightier matters of the law.

Then Lady Lucy took her leave; Marsham saw her to her carriage. The two left behind watched the receding figures—the mother, bent and tottering, clinging to her son.

"She is terribly shaken," said Sir James; "but she will never give way."

Diana did not reply, and as he glanced at her, he saw that she was struggling for self-control, her eyes on the ground.

"And that woman might have had her for daughter!" he said to himself, divining in her the rebuff of some deep and tender instinct.

Marsham came back.

"The ambulance is just arriving."

Sir James nodded, and turned toward the house. Marsham detained him, dropping his voice.

"Let me go with him, and you take my fly."

Sir James frowned.

"That is all settled," he said, peremptorily. Then he looked at Diana. "I will see to everything in-doors. Will you take Miss Mallory into the garden?"

Diana submitted; though, for the first time, her face reddened faintly. She understood that Sir James wished her to be out of sight and hearing while they moved the dead.

That was a strange walk together for these two! Side by side, almost in silence, they followed the garden path

which had taken them to the downs, on a certain February evening. The thought of it hovered, a ghost unlaid, in both their minds. Instinctively, Marsham guided her by this path, that they might avoid that spot on the farther lawn, where the scattered chairs, the trampled books and papers still showed where Death and Sleep had descended. Yet, as they passed it from a distance he saw the natural shudder run through her; and, by association, there flashed through him intolerably the memory of that moment of divine abandonment in their last interview, when he had comforted her, and she had clung to him. And now, how near she was to him—and yet how infinitely remote! She walked beside him, her step faltering now and then, her head thrown back, as though she craved for air and coolness on her brow and tear-stained eyes. He could not flatter himself that his presence disturbed her, that she was thinking at all about him. As for him, his mind, held as it still was in the grip of catastrophe, and stunned by new compunctions, was still susceptible from time to time of the most discordant and agitating recollections—memories glancing, lightning-quick, through the mind, unsummoned and shattering. Her face in the moonlight, her voice in the great words of her promise—"all that a woman can!"—that wretched evening in the House of Commons when he had finally deserted her—a certain passage with Alicia, in the Tallyn woods—these images quivered, as it were, through nerve and vein, disabling and silencing him.

But presently, to his astonishment, Diana began to talk, in her natural voice, without a trace of preoccupation or embarrassment. She poured out her latest recollections of Ferrier. She spoke, brushing away her tears

sometimes, of his visit in the morning, and his talk as he lay beside them on the grass—his recent letters to her—her remembrance of him in Italy.

Marsham listened in silence. What she said was new to him, and often bitter. He had known nothing of this intimate relation which had sprung up so rapidly between her and Ferrier. While he acknowledged its beauty and delicacy, the very thought of it, even at this moment, filled him with an irritable jealousy. The new bond had arisen out of the wreck of those he had himself broken; Ferrier had turned to her, and she to Ferrier, just as he, by his own acts, had lost them both; it might be right and natural; he winced under it—in a sense, resented it—none the less.

And all the time he never ceased to be conscious of the newspaper in his breast-pocket, and of that faint pencilled line that seemed to burn against his heart.

Would she shrink from him, finally and irrevocably, if she knew it? Once or twice he looked at her curiously, wondering at the power that women have of filling and softening a situation. Her broken talk of Ferrier was the only possible talk that could have arisen between them at that moment without awkwardness, without risk. To that last ground of friendship she could still admit him, and a wounded self-love suggested that she chose it for his sake as well as Ferrier's.

Of course, she had seen him with Alicia, and must have drawn her conclusions. Four months after the breach with her!—and such a breach! As he walked beside her through the radiant scented garden, with its massed roses and delphiniums, its tangle of poppy and lupin, he suddenly beheld himself as a kind of outcast—distrusted and disliked by an old friend like Chide,

separated forever from the good opinion of this girl whom he had loved, suspected even by his mother, and finally crushed by this unexpected tragedy, and by the shock of Barrington's unpardonable behavior.

Then his whole being reacted in a fierce protesting irritation. He had been the victim of circumstance as much as she. His will hardened to a passionate self-defence; he flung off, he held at bay, an anguish that must and should be conquered. He had to live his life. He would live it.

They passed into the orchard, where, amid the old trees, covered with tiny green apples, some climbing roses were running at will, hanging their trails of blossom, crimson and pale pink, from branch to branch. Linnets and blackbirds made a pleasant chatter; the grass beneath the trees was rich and soft, and through their tops, one saw white clouds hovering in a blazing blue.

Diana turned suddenly toward the house.

"I think we may go back now," she said, and her hand contracted and her lip, as though she realized that her dear dead friend had left her roof forever.

They hurried back, but there was still time for conversation.

"You knew him, of course, from a child?" she said to him, glancing at him with timid interrogation.

In reply he forced himself to play that part of Ferrier's intimate—almost son—which, indeed, she had given him, by implication, throughout her own talk. In this she had shown a tact, a kindness for which he owed her gratitude. She must have heard the charges brought against him by the Ferrier party during the election, yet, noble creature that she was, she had not believed them.

He could have thanked her aloud, till he remembered that marked newspaper in his pocket.

Once a straggling rose branch caught in her dress. He stooped to free it. Then for the first time he saw her shrink. The instinctive service had made them man and woman again—not mind and mind; and he perceived, with a miserable throb, that she could not be so unconscious of his identity, his presence, their past, as she had seemed to be.

She had lost—he realized it—the bloom of first youth. How thin was the hand which gathered up her dress!—the hand once covered with his kisses. Yet she seemed to him lovelier than ever, and he divined her more woman than ever, more instinct with feeling, life, and passion.

Sir James's messenger met them half-way. At the door the ambulance waited.

Chide, bareheaded, and a group of doctors, gardeners, and police stood beside it.

"I follow you," said Marsham to Sir James. "There is a great deal to do."

Chide assented coldly. "I have written to Broadstone, and I have sent a preliminary statement to the papers."

"I can take anything you want to town," said Marsham, hastily. "I must go up this evening."

He handed Broadstone's telegram to Sir James.

Chide read it and returned it in silence. Then he entered the ambulance, taking his seat beside the shrouded form within. Slowly it drove away, mounted police accompanying it. It took a back way from Beechcote, thus avoiding the crowd, which on the village side had gathered round the gates.

Diana, on the steps, saw it go, following it with her eyes; standing very white and still. Then Marsham lifted his hat to her, conscious through every nerve of the curiosity among the little group of people standing by. Suddenly, he thought, she too divined it. For she looked round her, bowed to him slightly, and disappeared with Mrs. Colwood.

He spent two or three hours at Lytchett, making the first arrangements for the funeral, with Sir James. It was to be at Tallyn, and the burial in the church-yard of the old Tallyn church. Sir James gave a slow and grudging assent to this; but in the end he did assent, after the relations between him and Marsham had become still more strained.

Further statements were drawn up for the newspapers. As the afternoon wore on the grounds and hall of Lytchett betrayed the presence of a number of reporters, hurriedly sent thither by the chief London and provincial papers. By now the news had travelled through England.

Marsham worked hard, saving Sir James all he could. Another messenger arrived from Lord Broadstone, with a pathetic letter for Sir James. Chide's face darkened over it. "Broadstone must bear up," he said to Marsham, as they stood together in Chide's sanctum. "It was not his fault, and he has the country to think of. You tell him so. Now, are you off?"

Marsham replied that his fly had been announced.

"What 'll they offer you?" said Chide, abruptly.

"Offer me? It doesn't much matter, does it?—on a day like this?" Marsham's tone was equally curt. Then he added: "I shall be here again to-morrow."

Chide acquiesced. When Marsham had driven off, and as the sound of the wheels died away, Chide uttered a fierce inarticulate sound. His hot Irish heart swelled within him. He walked hurriedly to and fro, his hands in his pockets.

"John!—John!" he groaned. "They'll be dancing and triumphing on your grave to-night, John; and that fellow you were a father to—like the rest. But they shall do it without me, John—they shall do it without me!"

And he thought, with a grim satisfaction, of the note he had just confided to the Premier's second messenger refusing the offer of the Attorney-Generalship. He was sorry for Broadstone; he had done his best to comfort him; but he would serve in no Government with John's supplanters.

Meanwhile Marsham was speeding up to town. At every way-side station, under the evening light, he saw the long lines of placards: "Sudden death of Mr. Ferrier. Effect on the new Ministry." Every paper he bought was full of comments and hasty biographies. There was more than a conventional note of loss in them. Ferrier was not widely popular, in the sense in which many English statesmen have been popular, but there was something in his personality that had long since won the affection and respect of all that public, in all classes, which really observes and directs English affairs. He was sincerely mourned, and he would be practically missed.

But the immediate effect would be the triumph of the Cave, a new direction given to current politics. That no one doubted.

Marsham was lost in tumultuous thought. The truth was that the two articles in the *Herald* of that morning, which had arrived at Tallyn by nine o'clock, had struck him with nothing less than consternation.

Ever since his interview with Barrington, he had persuaded himself that in it he had laid the foundations of party reunion; and he had since been eagerly scanning the signs of slow change in the attitude of the party paper, combined—as they had been up to this very day—with an unbroken personal loyalty to Ferrier. But the article of this morning had shown a complete—and in Oliver's opinion, as he read it at the breakfast-table—an extravagant *volte-face*. It amounted to nothing less than a vehement appeal to the new Prime Minister to intrust the leadership of the House of Commons, at so critical a moment, to a man more truly in sympathy with the forward policy of the party.

"We have hoped against hope," said the *Herald;* "we have supported Mr. Ferrier against all opposition; but a careful reconsideration and analysis of his latest speeches—taken together with our general knowledge public and private, of the political situation—have convinced us, sorely against our will, that while Mr. Ferrier must, of course, hold one of the most important offices in the new Cabinet, his leadership of the Commons—in view of the two great measures to which the party is practically pledged—could only bring calamity. He will not oppose them; that, of course, we know; but is it possible that he can *fight them through* with success? We appeal to his patriotism, which has never yet failed him or us. If he will only accept the peerage he has so amply earned, together with either the War Office or the Admiralty, and represent the Government in the Lords, where it is

sorely in need of strength, all will be well. The leadership of the Commons must necessarily fall to that section of the party which, through Lord Philip's astonishing campaign, has risen so rapidly in public favor. Lord Philip himself, indeed, is no more acceptable to the moderates than Mr. Ferrier to the Left Wing. Heat of personal feeling alone would prevent his filling the part successfully. But two or three men are named, under whom Lord Philip would be content to serve, while the moderates would have nothing to say against them."

This was damaging enough. But far more serious was the "communicated" article on the next page—"from a correspondent"—on which the "leader" was based.

Marsham saw at once that the "correspondent" was really Barrington himself, and that the article was wholly derived from the conversation which had taken place at Tallyn, and from the portions of Ferrier's letters, which Marsham had read or summarized for the journalist's benefit.

The passage in particular which Ferrier's dying hand had marked—he recalled the gleam in Barrington's black eyes as he had listened to it, the instinctive movement in his powerful hand, as though to pounce, vulturelike, on the letter—and his own qualm of anxiety—his sudden sense of having gone too far—his insistence on discretion.

Discretion indeed! The whole thing was monstrous treachery. He had warned the man that these few sentences were not to be taken literally—that they were, in fact, Ferrier's caricature of himself and his true opinion. "You press on me a particular measure," they said, in effect, "you expect the millennium from

it. Well, I'll tell you what you'll really get by it!"—and then a forecast of the future, after the great Bill was passed, in Ferrier's most biting vein.

The passage in the *Herald* was given as a paraphrase, or, rather, as a kind of *reductio ad absurdum* of one of Ferrier's last speeches in the House. It was, in truth, a literal quotation from one of the letters. Barrington had an excellent memory. He had omitted nothing. The stolen sentences made the point, the damning point, of the article. They were not exactly quoted as Ferrier's, but they claimed to express Ferrier more closely than he had yet expressed himself. "We have excellent reason to believe that this is, in truth, the attitude of Mr. Ferrier." How, then, could a man of so cold and sceptical a temper continue to lead the young reformers of the party? The *Herald*, with infinite regret, made its bow to its old leader, and went over bag and baggage to the camp of Lord Philip, who, Marsham could not doubt, had been in close consultation with the editor through the whole business.

Again and again, as the train sped on, did Marsham go back over the fatal interview which had led to these results. His mind, full of an agony of remorse he could not still, was full also of storm and fury against Barrington. Never had a journalist made a more shameful use of a trust reposed in him.

With torturing clearness, imagination built up the scene in the garden: the arrival of Broadstone's letter; the hand of the stricken man groping for the newspaper; the effort of those pencilled lines; and, finally, that wavering mark, John Ferrier's last word on earth.

If it had, indeed, been meant for him, Oliver—well,

he had received it; the dead man had reached out and touched him; he felt the brand upon him; and it was a secret forever between Ferrier and himself.

The train was nearing St. Pancras. Marsham roused himself with an effort. After all, what fault was it of his—this tragic coincidence of a tragic day? If Ferrier had lived, all could have been explained; or if not all, most. And because Ferrier had died of a sudden ailment, common among men worn out with high responsibilities, was a man to go on reproaching himself eternally for another man's vile behavior—for the results of an indiscretion committed with no ill-intent whatever? With miserable self-control, Oliver turned his mind to his approaching interview with the Prime Minister. Up to the morning of this awful day he had been hanging on the Cabinet news from hour to hour. The most important posts would, of, course be filled first. Afterward would come the minor appointments—and then!

Marsham found the Premier much shaken. He was an old man; he had been a warm personal friend of Ferrier's; and the blow had hit him hard.

Evidently for a few hours he had been determined to resign; but strong influences had been brought to bear, and he had wearily resumed his task.

Reluctantly, Marsham told the story. Poor Lord Broadstone could not escape from the connection between the arrival of his letter and the seizure which had killed his old comrade. He sat bowed beneath it for a while; then, with a fortitude and a self-control which never fails men of his type in times of public stress and difficulty, he roused himself to discuss the political

situation which had arisen—so far, at least, as was necessary and fitting in the case of a man not in the inner circle.

As the two men sat talking the messenger arrived from Beechcote with Sir James Chide's letter. From the Premier's expression as he laid it down Marsham divined that it contained Chide's refusal to join the Government. Lord Broadstone got up and began to move to and fro, wrapped in a cloud of thought. He seemed to forget Marsham's présence, and Marsham made a movement to go. As he did so Lord Broadstone looked up and came toward him.

"I am much obliged to you for having come so promptly," he said, with melancholy courtesy. "I thought we should have met soon—on an occasion—more agreeable to us both. As you are here, forgive me if I talk business. This rough-and-tumble world has to be carried on, and if it suits you, I shall be happy to recommend your appointment to her Majesty—as a Junior Lord of the Treasury—carrying with it, as of course you understand, the office of Second Whip."

Ten minutes later Marsham left the Prime Minister's house. As he walked back to St. Pancras, he was conscious of yet another smart added to the rest. If *anything* were offered to him, he had certainly hoped for something more considerable.

It looked as though while the Ferrier influence had ignored him, the Darcy influence had not troubled itself to do much for him. That he had claims could not be denied. So this very meagre bone had been flung him. But if he had refused it, he would have got nothing else.

The appointment would involve re-election. All that infernal business to go through again!—probably in

the very midst of disturbances in the mining district. The news from the collieries was as bad as it could be.

He reached home very late—close on midnight. His mother had gone to bed, ill and worn out, and was not to be disturbed. Isabel Fotheringham and Alicia awaited him in the drawing-room.

Mrs. Fotheringham had arrived in the course of the evening. She herself was peevish with fatigue, incurred in canvassing for two of Lord Philip's most headlong supporters. Personally, she had broken with John Ferrier some weeks before the election; but the fact had made more impression on her own mind than on his.

"Well, Oliver, this is a shocking thing! However, of course, Ferrier had been unhealthy for a long time; any one could see that. It was really better it should end so."

"You take it calmly!" he said, scandalized by her manner and tone.

"I am sorry, of course. But Ferrier had outlived himself. The people I have been working among felt him merely in the way. But, of course, I am sorry mamma is dreadfully upset. That one must expect. Well, now then—you have seen Broadstone?"

She rose to question him, the political passion in her veins asserting itself against her weariness. She was still in her travelling dress. From her small, haggard face the reddish hair was drawn tightly back; the spectacled eyes, the dry lips, expressed a woman whose life had hardened to dusty uses. Her mere aspect chilled and repelled her brother, and he answered her questions shortly.

"Broadstone has treated you shabbily!" she remarked,

with decision; "but I suppose you will have to put up with it. And this terrible thing that has happened to-day may tell against you when it comes to the election. Ferrier will be looked upon as a martyr, and we shall suffer."

Oliver turned his eyes for relief to Alicia. She, in a soft black dress, with many slender chains, studded with beautiful turquoises, about her white neck, rested and cheered his sight. The black was for sympathy with the family sorrow; the turquoises were there because he specially admired them; he understood them both. The night was hot, and without teasing him with questions she had brought him a glass of iced lemonade, touching him caressingly on the arm while he drank it.

"Poor Mr. Ferrier! It was terribly, terribly sad!" Her voice was subtly tuned and pitched. It made no fresh claim on emotion, of which, in his mental and moral exhaustion, he had none to give; but it more than met the decencies of the situation, which Isabel had flouted.

"So there will be another election?" she said, presently, still standing in front of him, erect and provocative, her eyes fixed on his.

"Yes; but I sha'n't be such a brute as to bother you with it this time."

"I shall decide that for myself," she said, lightly. Then—after a pause: "So Lord Philip has won!—all along the line! I should like to know that man!"

"You do know him."

"Oh, just to pass the time of day. That's nothing. But I am to meet him at the Treshams' next week." Her eyes sparkled a little. Marsham glanced at his sister, who was gathering up some small possessions at the end of the room.

"Don't try and make a fool of him!" he said, in a low voice. "He's not your sort."

"Isn't he?" She laughed. "I suppose he's one of the biggest men in England now. And somebody told me the other day that, after losing two or three fortunes, he had just got another."

Marsham nodded.

"Altogether, an excellent *parti*."

Alicia's infectious laugh broke out. She sat down beside him, with her hands round her knees.

"You look miles better than when you came in. But I think—you'd better go to bed."

As Marsham, in undressing, flung his coat upon a chair, the copy of the *Herald* which he had momentarily forgotten fell out of the inner pocket. He raised it—irresolute. Should he tear it up, and throw the fragments away?

No. He could not bring himself to do it. It was as though Ferrier, lying still and cold at Lytchett, would know of it—as though the act would do some roughness to the dead.

He went into his sitting-room, found an empty drawer in his writing-table, thrust in the newspaper, and closed the drawer.

CHAPTER XX

"I REGARD this second appeal to West Brookshire as an insult!" said the Vicar of Beechcote, hotly. "If Mr. Marsham must needs accept an office that involved re-election he might have gone elsewhere. I see there is already a vacancy by death—and a Liberal seat, too—in Sussex. *We* told him pretty plainly what we thought of him last time."

"And now I suppose you will turn him out?" asked the doctor, lazily. In the beatitude induced by a completed article and an afternoon smoke, he was for the moment incapable of taking a tragic view either of Marsham's shortcomings or his prospects.

"Certainly, we shall turn him out."

"Ah!—a Labor candidate?" said the doctor, showing a little more energy.

Whereupon the Vicar, with as strong a relish for the *primeur* of an important piece of news as any secular fighter, described a meeting held the night before in one of the mining villages, at which he had been a speaker. The meeting had decided to run a miners' candidate; expenses had been guaranteed; and the resolution passed meant, according to Lavery, that Marsham would be badly beaten, and that Colonel Simpson, his Conservative opponent, would be handsomely presented with a seat in Parliament, to which his own personal merits had no claim whatever.

"But that we put up with," said the Vicar, grimly. "The joy of turning out Marsham is compensation."

The doctor turned an observant eye on his companion's clerical coat.

"Shall we hear these sentiments next Sunday from the pulpit?" he asked, mildly.

The Vicar had the grace to blush slightly.

"I say, no doubt, more than I should say," he admitted. Then he rose, buttoning his long coat down his long body deliberately, as though by the action he tried to restrain the surge within; but it overflowed all the same. "I know now," he said, with a kindling eye, holding out a gaunt hand in farewell, "what our Lord meant by sending, not peace—but a sword!"

"So, no doubt, did Torquemada!" replied the doctor, surveying him.

The Vicar rose to the challenge.

"I will be no party to the usual ignorant abuse of the Inquisition," he said, firmly. "We live in days of license, and have no right to sit in judgment on our forefathers."

"*Your* forefathers," corrected the doctor. "Mine burned."

The Vicar first laughed; then grew serious. "Well, I'll allow you two opinions on the Inquisition, but not—" he lifted a gesticulating hand—"*not* two opinions on mines which are death-traps for lack of a little money to make them safe—*not* on the kind of tyranny which says to a man: 'Strike if you like, and take a week's notice at the same time to give up your cottage, which belongs to the colliery' — or, 'Make a fuss about allotments if you dare, and see how long you keep your berth in my employment: we don't want any agitators here'—or

maintains, against all remonstrance, a brutal manager in office, whose rule crushes out a man's self-respect, and embitters his soul!"

"You charge all these things against Marsham?"

"He—or, rather, his mother—has a large holding in collieries against which I charge them."

"H'm. Lady Lucy isn't standing for West Brookshire."

"No matter. The son's teeth are set on edge. Marsham has been appealed to, and has done nothing—attempted nothing. He makes eloquent Liberal speeches, and himself spends money got by grinding the poor!"

"You make him out a greater fool than I believe him," said the doctor. "He has probably attempted a great deal, and finds his power limited. Moreover, he has been eight years member here, and these charges are quite new."

"Because the spirit abroad is new!" cried the Vicar. "Men will no longer bear what their fathers bore. The old excuses, the old pleas, serve no longer. I tell you the poor are tired of their patience! The Kingdom of Heaven, in its earthly aspect, is not to be got that way—no! 'The violent take it by force!' And as to your remark about Marsham, half the champions of democracy in this country are in the same box: prating about liberty and equality abroad; grinding their servants and underpaying their laborers at home. I know scores of them; and how any of them keep a straight face at a public meeting I never could understand. There is a French proverb that exactly expresses them—"

"I know," murmured the doctor, "I know. '*Joie de rue, douleur de maison.*' Well, and so, to upset Marsham, you are going to let the Tories in, eh?—with all the old

tyrannies and briberies on their shoulders?—naked and unashamed. Hullo!"—he looked round him—"don't tell Patricia I said so—or Hugh."

"There is no room for a middle party," was the Vicar's fierce reply. "Socialists on the one side, Tories on the other!—that 'll be the Armageddon of the future."

The doctor, declining to be drawn, nodded placidly through the clouds of smoke that enwrapped him. The Vicar hurried away, accompanied, however, furtively to the door, even to the gate of the drive, by Mrs. Roughsedge, who had questions to ask.

She came back presently with a thoughtful countenance.

"I asked him what he thought I ought to do about those tales I told you of."

"Why don't you settle for yourself?" cried the doctor, testily. "That is the way you women flatter the pride of these priests!"

"Not at all. *You* make him talk nonsense; I find him a fount of wisdom."

"I admit he knows some moral theology," said Roughsedge, thoughtfully. "He has thought a good deal about 'sins' and 'sin.' Well, what was his view about these particular 'sinners'?"

"He thinks Diana ought to know."

"She can't do any good, and it will keep her awake at nights. I object altogether."

However, Mrs. Roughsedge, having first dropped a pacifying kiss on her husband's gray hair, went up-stairs to put on her things, declaring that she was going there and then to Beechcote.

The doctor was left to ponder over the gossip in question, and what Diana could possibly do to meet it. Poor

child!—was she never to be free from scandal and publicity?

As to the couple of people involved—Fred Birch and that odious young woman Miss Fanny Merton—he did not care in the least what happened to them. And he could not see, for the life of him, why Diana should care either. But of course she would. In her ridiculous way, she would think she had some kind of responsibility, just because the girl's mother and her mother happened to have been brought up in the same nursery.

"A plague on Socialist vicars, and a plague on dear good women!" thought the doctor, knocking out his pipe. "What with philanthropy and this delicate altruism that takes the life out of women, the world becomes a kind of impenetrable jungle, in which everybody's business is intertwined with everybody else's, and there is nobody left with primitive brutality enough to hew a way through! And those of us that might lead a decent life on this ill-arranged planet are all crippled and hamstrung by what we call unselfishness." The doctor vigorously replenished his pipe. "I vow I will go to Greece next spring, and leave Patricia behind!"

Meanwhile, Mrs. Roughsedge walked to Beechcote—in meditation. The facts she pondered were these, to put them as shortly as possible. Fred Birch was fast becoming the *mauvais sujet* of the district. His practice was said to be gone, his money affairs were in a desperate condition, and his mother and sister had already taken refuge with relations. He had had recourse to the time-honored expedients of his type: betting on horses and on stocks with other people's money. It was said that he had kept on the safe side of the law; but one or two incidents in his career had emerged to light quite

recently, which had led all the scrupulous in Dunscombe to close their doors upon him; and as he had no means of bribing the unscrupulous, he had now become a mere object-lesson for babes as to the advantages of honesty.

At the same time Miss Fanny Merton, first introduced to Brookshire by Brookshire's favorite, Diana Mallory, was constantly to be seen in the black sheep's company. They had been observed together, both in London and the country—at race-meetings and theatres; and a brawl in the Dunscombe refreshment-room, late at night, in which Birch had been involved, brought out the scandalous fact that Miss Merton was in his company. Birch was certainly not sober, and it was said by the police that Miss Merton also had had more port wine than was good for her.

All this Brookshire knew, and none of it did Diana know. Since her return she and Mrs. Colwood had lived so quietly within their own borders that the talk of the neighborhood rarely reached her, and those persons who came in contact with her were far too deeply touched by the signs of suffering in the girl's face and manner to breathe a word that might cause her fresh pain. Brookshire knew, through one or other of the mysterious channels by which such news travels, that the two cousins were uncongenial; that it was Fanny Merton who had revealed to Diana her mother's history, and in an abrupt, unfeeling way; and that the two girls were not now in communication. Fanny had been boarding with friends in Bloomsbury, and was supposed to be returning to her family in Barbadoes in the autumn.

The affair at the refreshment-room was to be heard of at Petty Sessions, and would, therefore, get into the local

papers. Mrs. Roughsedge felt there was nothing for it; Diana must be told. But she hated her task.

On reaching Beechcote she noticed a fly at the door, and paused a moment to consider whether her visit might not be inopportune. It was a beautiful day, and Diana and Mrs. Colwood were probably to be found in some corner of the garden. Mrs. Roughsedge walked round the side of the house to reconnoitre.

As she reached the beautiful old terrace at the back of the house, on which the drawing-room opened, suddenly a figure came flying through the drawing-room window—the figure of a girl in a tumbled muslin dress, with a large hat, and a profusion of feathers and streamers fluttering about her. In her descent upon the terrace she dropped her gloves; stooping to pick them up, she dropped her boa; in her struggle to recapture that, she trod on and tore her dress.

"*Damn!*" said the young lady, furiously.

And at the voice, the word, the figure, Mrs. Roughsedge stood arrested and open-mouthed, her old woman's bonnet slipping back a little on her gray curls.

The young woman was Fanny Merton. She had evidently just arrived, and was in search of Diana. Mrs. Roughsedge thought a moment, and then turned and sadly walked home again. No good interfering now! Poor Diana would have to tackle the situation for herself.

Diana and Mrs. Colwood were on the lawn, surreptitiously at work on clothes for the child in the spinal jacket, who was soon going away to a convalescent home, and had to be rigged out. The grass was strewn with pieces of printed cotton and flannel, with books

and work-baskets. But they were not sitting where Ferrier had looked his last upon the world three weeks before. There, under the tall limes, across the lawn, on that sad and sacred spot, Diana meant in the autumn to plant a group of cypresses (the tree of mourning) "for remembrance."

"Fanny!" cried Diana, in amazement, rising from her chair.

At her cousin's voice, Fanny halted, a few yards away.

"Well," she said, defiantly, "of course I know you didn't expect to see me!"

Diana had grown very pale. Muriel saw a shiver run through her—the shiver of the victim brought once more into the presence of the torturer.

"I thought you were in London," she stammered, moving forward and holding out her hand mechanically. "Please come and sit down." She cleared a chair of the miscellaneous needlework upon it.

"I want to speak to you very particularly," said Fanny. "And it's private!" She looked at Mrs. Colwood, with whom she had exchanged a frosty greeting. Diana made a little imploring sign, and Muriel—unwillingly—moved away toward the house.

"Well, I don't suppose you want to have anything to do with me," said Fanny, after a moment, in a sulky voice. "But, after all, you're mother's niece. I'm in a pretty tight fix, and it mightn't be very pleasant for you if things came to the worst."

She had thrown off her hat, and was patting and pulling the numerous puffs and bandeaux, in which her hair was arranged, with a nervous hand. Diana was aghast at her appearance. The dirty finery of her dress had sunk many degrees in the scale of decency and

refinement since February. Her staring brunette color had grown patchy and unhealthy, her eyes had a furtive audacity, her lips a coarseness, which might have been always there; but in the winter, youth and high spirits had to some extent disguised them.

"Aren't you soon going home?" asked Diana, looking at her with a troubled brow.

"No, I'm—I'm engaged. I thought you might have known that!" The girl turned fiercely upon her.

"No—I hadn't heard—"

"Well, I don't know where you live all your time!" said Fanny, impatiently. "There's heaps of people at Dunscombe know that I've been engaged to Fred Birch for three months. I wasn't going to write to you, of course, because I—well!—I knew you thought I'd been rough on you—about that—you know."

"*Fred Birch!*" Diana's voice was faltering and amazed.

Fanny twisted her hat in her hands.

"He's all right," she said, angrily, "if his business hadn't been ruined by a lot of nasty crawling tale-tellers. If people 'd only mind their own business! However, there it is—he's ruined—he hasn't got a penny piece—and, of course, he can't marry me, if—well, if somebody don't help us out."

Diana's face changed.

"Do you mean that I should help you out?"

"Well, there's no one else!" said Fanny, still, as it seemed, defying something or some one.

"I gave you—a thousand pounds."

"You gave it *mother!* I got precious little of it. I've had to borrow, lately, from people in the boarding-house. And I can't get any more—there! I'm just broke—stony."

She was still looking straight before her, but her lip trembled.

Diana bent forward impetuously.

"Fanny!" she said, laying her hand on her cousin's, "*do* go home!"

Fanny's lip continued to tremble.

"I tell you I'm engaged," she repeated, in a muffled voice.

"Don't marry him!" cried Diana, imploringly. "He's not—he's not a good man."

"What do you know about it? He's well enough, though I dare say he's not your sort. He'd be all right if somebody would just lend a hand—help him with the debts, and put him on his feet again. He suits me, anyway. I'm not so thin-skinned."

Diana stiffened. Fanny's manner — as of old — was almost incredible, considered as the manner of one in difficulties asking for help. The sneering insolence of it inevitably provoked the person addressed.

"Have you told Aunt Bertha?" she said, coldly—"asked her consent?"

"Mother? Oh, I've told her I'm engaged. She knows very well that I manage my own business."

Diana withdrew her chair a little.

"When are you going to be married? Are you still with those friends?"

Fanny laughed.

"Oh, Lord, no! I fell out with them long ago. They were a wretched lot! But I found a girl I knew, and we set up together. I've been in a blouse-shop earning thirty shillings a week—there! And if I hadn't, I'd have starved!"

Fanny raised her head. Their eyes met: Fanny's

full of mingled bravado and misery; Diana's suddenly stricken with deep and remorseful distress.

"Fanny, I told you to write to me if there was anything wrong! Why didn't you?"

"You hated me!" said Fanny, sullenly.

"I didn't!" cried Diana, the tears rising to her eyes. "But—you hurt me so!" Then again she bent forward, laying her hand on her cousin's, speaking fast and low. "Fanny, I'm very sorry!—if I'd known you were in trouble I'd have come or written—I thought you were with friends, and I knew the money had been paid. But, Fanny, I *implore* you!—give up Mr. Birch! Nobody speaks well of him! You'll be miserable!—you must be!"

"Too late to think of that!" said Fanny, doggedly.

Diana looked up in sudden terror. Fanny tried to brazen it out. But all the patchy color left her cheeks, and, dropping her head on her hands, she began to sob. Yet even the sobs were angry.

"I can go and drown myself!" she said, passionately, "and I suppose I'd better. Nobody cares whether I do or not! He's made a fool of me—I don't suppose mother 'll take me home again. And if he doesn't marry me, I'll kill myself somehow—it don't matter how—before—I've got to!"

Diana had dropped on her knees beside her visitor. Unconsciously — pitifully — she breathed her cousin's name. Fanny looked up. She wrenched herself violently away.

"Oh, it's all very well!—but we can't all be such saints as you. It 'd be all right if he married me directly—*directly*," she repeated, hurriedly.

Diana knelt still immovable. In her face was that

agonized shock and recoil with which the young and pure, the tenderly cherished and guarded, receive the first withdrawal of the veil which hides from them the more brutal facts of life. But, as she knelt there, gazing at Fanny, another expression stole upon and effaced the first. Taking shape and body, as it were, from the experience of the moment, there rose into sight the new soul developed in her by this tragic year. Not for her —not for Juliet Sparling's daughter—the plea of cloistered innocence! By a sharp transition her youth had passed from the Chamber of Maiden Thought into the darkened Chamber of Experience. She had steeped her heart in the waters of sin and suffering; she put from her in an instant the mere maiden panic which had drawn her to her knees.

"Fanny, I'll help you!" she said, in a low voice, putting her arms round her cousin. "Don't cry—I'll help you."

Fanny raised her head. In Diana's face there was something which, for the first time, roused in the other a nascent sense of shame. The color came rushing into her cheeks; her eyes wavered painfully.

"You must come and stay here," said Diana, almost in a whisper. "And where is Mr. Birch? I must see him."

She rose as she spoke; her voice had a decision, a sternness, that Fanny for once did not resent. But she shook her head despairingly.

"I can't get at him. He sends my letters back. He'll not marry me unless he's paid to."

"When did you see him last?"

Gradually the whole story emerged. The man had behaved as the coarse and natural man face to face with

temptation and opportunity is likely to behave. The girl had been the victim first and foremost of her own incredible folly. And Diana could not escape the idea that on Birch's side there had not been wanting from the first an element of sinister calculation. If her relations objected to the situation, it could, of course, be made worth his while to change it. All his recent sayings and doings, as Fanny reported them, clearly bore this interpretation.

As Diana sat, dismally pondering, an idea flashed upon her. Sir James Chide was to dine at Beechcote that night. He was expected early, would take in Beechcote, indeed, on his way from the train to Lytchett. Who else should advise her if not he? In a hundred ways, practical and tender, he had made her understand that, for her mother's sake and her own, she was to him as a daughter.

She mentioned him to Fanny.

"Of course"—she hurried over the words—"we need only say that you have been engaged. We must consult him, I suppose, about—about breach of promise of marriage."

The odious, hearsay phrase came out with difficulty. But Fanny's eyes glistened at the name of the great lawyer.

Her feelings toward the man who had betrayed her were clearly a medley of passion and of hatred. She loved him as she was able to love; and she wished, at the same time, to coerce and be revenged on him. The momentary sense of shame had altogether passed. It was Diana who, with burning cheeks, stipulated that while Fanny must not return to town, but must stay at Beechcote till matters were arranged, she should not

appear during Sir James's visit; and it was Fanny who said, with vindictive triumph, as Diana left her in her room; "Sir James 'll know well enough what sort of damages I could get!"

After dinner Diana and Sir James walked up and down the lime-walk in the August moonlight. His affection, as soon as he saw her, had been conscious of yet another strain upon her, but till she began to talk to him *tête-à-tête* he got no clew to it; and even then what he guessed had very little to do with what she said. She told her cousin's story so far as she meant to tell it with complete self-possession. Her cousin was in love with this wretched man, and had got herself terribly talked about. She could not be persuaded to give him up, while he could only be induced to marry her by the prospect of money. Could Sir James see him and find out how much would content him, and whether any decent employment could be found for him?

Sir James held his peace, except for the "Yeses" and "Noes" that Diana's conversation demanded. He would certainly interview the young man; he was very sorry for her anxieties; he would see what could be done.

Meanwhile, he never communicated to her that he had travelled down to Beechcote in the same carriage with Lady Felton, the county gossip, and that in addition to other matters—of which more anon—the refreshment-room story had been discussed between them, with additions and ramifications leading to very definite conclusions in any rational mind as to the nature of the bond between Diana's cousin and the young Dunscombe solicitor. Lady Felton had expressed her concern for Miss Mallory. "Poor thing!—do you think she knows?

Why on earth did she ever ask him to Beechcote! Alicia Drake told me she saw him there."

These things Sir James did not disclose. He played Diana's game with perfect discretion. He guessed, even that Fanny was in the house, but he said not a word. No need at all to question the young woman. If in such a case he could not get round a rascally solicitor, what could he do?—and what was the good of being the leader of the criminal Bar?

Only when Diana, at the end of their walk, shyly remarked that money was not to stand in the way; that she had plenty; that Beechcote was no doubt too expensive for her, but that the tenancy was only a yearly one, and she had but to give notice at Michaelmas, which she thought of doing—only then did Sir James allow himself a laugh.

"You think I am going to let this business turn you out of Beechcote—eh?—you preposterous little angel!"

"Not this business," stammered Diana; "but I am really living at too great a rate."

Sir James grinned, patted her ironically on the shoulder, told her to be a good girl, and departed.

Fanny stayed for a week at Beechcote, and at the end of that time Diana and Mrs. Colwood accompanied her on a Saturday to town, and she was married, to a sheepish and sulky bridegroom, by special license, at a Marylebone church—Sir James Chide, in the background, looking on. They departed for a three days' holiday to Brighton, and on the fourth day they were due to sail by a West Indian steamer for Barbadoes, where Sir James had procured for Mr. Frederick Birch a post in the office of a large sugar estate, in which an old friend

of Chide's had an interest. Fanny showed no rapture in the prospect of thus returning to the bosom of her family. But there was no help for it.

By what means the transformation scene had been effected it would be waste of time to inquire. Much to Diana's chagrin, Sir James entirely declined to allow her to aid in it financially, except so far as equipping her cousin with clothes went, and providing her with a small sum for her wedding journey. Personally, he considered that the week during which Fanny stayed at Beechcote was as much as Diana could be expected to contribute, and that she had indeed paid the lion's share.

Yet that week—if he had known—was full of strange comfort to Diana. Often Muriel, watching her, would escape to her own room to hide her tears. Fanny's second visit was not as her first. The first had seen the outraging and repelling of the nobler nature by the ignoble. Diana had frankly not been able to endure her cousin. There was not a trace of that now. Her father's papers had told her abundantly how flimsy, how nearly fraudulent, was the financial claim which Fanny and her belongings had set up. The thousand pounds had been got practically on false pretences, and Diana knew it now, in every detail. Yet neither toward that, nor toward Fanny's other and worse lapses, did she show any bitterness, any spirit of mere disgust and reprobation. The last vestige of that just, instinctive pharisaism which clothes an unstained youth had dropped from her. As the heir of her mother's fate, she had gone down into the dark sea of human wrong and misery, and she had emerged transformed, more akin by far to the wretched and the unhappy than to the prosperous and the untempted, so that, through all repulsion and shock, she took Fanny

"SIR JAMES PLAYED DIANA'S GAME WITH PERFECT DISCRETION"

now as she found her—bearing with her—accepting her —loving her, as far as she could. At the last even that stubborn nature was touched. When Diana kissed her after the wedding, with a few tremulous good wishes, Fanny's gulp was not all excitement. Yet it must still be recorded that on the wedding-day Fanny was in the highest spirits, only marred by some annoyance that she had let Diana persuade her out of a white satin wedding-dress.

Diana's preoccupation with this matter carried her through the first week of Marsham's second campaign, and deadened so far the painful effect of the contest now once more thundering through the division. For it was even a more odious battle than the first had been. In the first place, the moderate Liberals held a meeting very early in the struggle, with Sir William Felton in the chair, to protest against the lukewarm support which Marsham had given to the late leader of the Opposition, to express their lamentation for Ferrier, and their distrust of Lord Philip; and to decide upon a policy.

At the meeting a heated speech was made by a gray-haired squire, an old friend and Oxford contemporary of John Ferrier's, who declared that he had it on excellent authority that the communicated article in the *Herald*, which had appeared on the morning of Ferrier's sudden death, had been written by Oliver Marsham.

This statement was reported in the newspapers of the following morning, and was at once denied by Marsham himself, in a brief letter to the *Times*.

It was this letter which Lady Felton discussed hotly with Sir James Chide on the day when Fanny Merton's misdemeanors also came up for judgment.

"He says he didn't write it. Sir William declares—a mere quibble! He has it from several people that Barrington was at Tallyn two days before the article appeared, and that he spoke to one or two friends next day of an 'important' conversation with Marsham, and of the first-hand information he had got from it. Nobody was so likely as Oliver to have that intimate knowledge of poor Mr. Ferrier's intentions and views. William believes that he gave Barrington all the information in the article, and wrote nothing himself, in order that he might be able to deny it."

Sir James met these remarks with an impenetrable face. He neither defended Marsham, nor did he join in Lady Felton's denunciations. But that good lady, who though voluble was shrewd, told her husband afterward that she was certain Sir James believed Marsham to be responsible for the *Herald* article.

A week later the subject was renewed at a very heated and disorderly meeting at Dunscombe. A bookseller's assistant, well known as one of the leading Socialists of the division, got up and in a suave mincing voice accused Marsham of having—not written, but—"communicated" the *Herald* article, and so dealt a treacherous blow at his old friend and Parliamentary leader—a blow which had no doubt contributed to the situation culminating in Mr. Ferrier's tragic death.

Marsham, very pale, sprang up at once, denied the charge, and fiercely attacked the man who had made it. But there was something so venomous in the manner of his denial, so undignified in the personalities with which it was accompanied, that the meeting suddenly took offence. The attack, instead of dying down, was renewed. Speaker after speaker got up and heckled the

candidate. Was Mr. Marsham aware that the editor of the *Herald* had been staying at Tallyn two days before the article appeared? Was he also aware that his name had been freely mentioned, in the *Herald* office, in connection with the article?

Marsham in vain endeavored to regain sang-froid and composure under these attacks. He haughtily repeated his denial, and refused to answer any more questions on the subject.

The local Tory paper rushed into the fray, and had presently collected a good deal of what it was pleased to call evidence on the matter, mainly gathered from London reporters. The matter began to look serious. Marsham appealed to Barrington to contradict the rumor publicly, as "absurd and untrue." But, unfortunately, Barrington, who was a man of quick and gusty temper, had been nettled by an incautious expression of Marsham's with regard to the famous article in his Dunscombe speech—"if I had had any intention whatever of dealing a dishonorable blow at my old friend and leader, I could have done it a good deal more effectively, I can assure you; I should not have put what I had to say in a form so confused and contradictory."

This—together with the general denial—happened to reach Barrington, and it rankled. When, therefore, Marsham appealed to him, he brusquely replied:

"Dear Mr. Marsham,—You know best what share you had in the *Herald* article. You certainly did not write it. But to my mind it very faithfully reproduced the gist of our conversation on a memorable evening. And, moreover, I believe and still believe that you intended the reproduction. Believe me, Yours faithfully, Ernest Barrington."

To this Marsham returned a stiff answer, giving his

own account of what had taken place, and regretting that even a keen journalist should have thought it consistent with his honor to make such injurious and unfair use of "my honest attempt to play the peacemaker" between the different factions of the party.

To this letter Barrington made no reply. Marsham, sore and weary, yet strung by now to an obstinacy and a fighting passion which gave a new and remarkable energy to his personality, threw himself fresh into a hopeless battle. For a time, indeed, the tide appeared to turn. He had been through two Parliaments a popular and successful member; less popular, no doubt, in the second than in the first, as the selfish and bitter strains in his character became more apparent. Still he had always commanded a strong personal following, especially among the younger men of the towns and villages, who admired his lithe and handsome presence, and appreciated his reputation as a sportsman and volunteer. Lady Lucy's subscriptions, too, were an element in the matter not to be despised.

A rally began in the Liberal host, which had felt itself already beaten. Marsham's meetings improved, the *Herald* article was apparently forgotten.

The anxiety now lay chiefly in the mining villages, where nothing seemed to affect the hostile attitude of the inhabitants. A long series of causes had led up to it, to be summed up perhaps in one—the harsh and domineering temper of the man who had for years managed the three Tallyn collieries, and who held Lady Lucy and her co-shareholders in the hollow of his hand. Lady Lucy, whose curious obstinacy had been roused, would not dismiss him, and nothing less than his summary dismissal would have appeased the dull hatred of six hundred miners.

Marsham had indeed attempted to put through a number of minor reforms, but the effect on the temper of the district had been, in the end, little or nothing. The colliers, who had once fervently supported him, thought of him now, either as a fine gentleman profiting pecuniarily by the ill deeds of a tyrant, or as sheltering behind his mother's skirts; the Socialist Vicar of Beechcote thundered against him; and for some time every meeting of his in the colliery villages was broken up. But in the more hopeful days of the last week, when the canvassing returns, together with Marsham's astonishing energy and brilliant speaking, had revived the failing heart of the party, it was resolved to hold a final meeting, on the night before the poll, at Hartingfield-on-the-Wold, the largest of the mining villages.

Marsham left Dunscombe for Hartingfield about six o'clock on an August evening, driving the coach, with its superb team of horses, which had become by now so familiar an object in the division. He was to return in time to make the final speech in the concluding Liberal meeting of the campaign, which was to be held that night, with the help of some half-dozen other members of Parliament, in the Dunscombe Corn Exchange.

A body of his supporters, gathered in the market-place, cheered him madly as the coach set off. Marsham stopped the horses for a minute outside the office of the local paper. The weekly issue came out that afternoon. It was handed up to him, and the coach rattled on.

McEwart, who was sitting beside him, opened it, and presently gave a low involuntary whistle of dismay. Marsham looked round.

"What's the matter?"

McEwart would have gladly flung the paper away. But looking round him he saw that several other persons on the top of the coach had copies, and that whispering consternation had begun.

He saw nothing for it but to hand the paper to Marsham. "This is playing it pretty low down!" he said, pointing to an item in large letters on the first page.

Marsham handed the reins to the groom beside him and took the paper. He saw, printed in full, Barrington's curt letter to himself on the subject of the *Herald* article, and below it the jubilant and scathing comments of the Tory editor.

He read both carefully, and gave the paper back to McEwart. "That decides the election," he said, calmly. McEwart's face assented.

Marsham, however, never showed greater pluck than at the Hartingfield meeting. It was a rowdy and disgraceful business, in which from beginning to end he scarcely got a hearing for more than three sentences at a time. A shouting mob of angry men, animated by passions much more than political, held him at bay. But on this occasion he never once lost his temper; he caught the questions and insults hurled at him, and threw them back with unfailing skill; and every now and then, at some lull in the storm, he made himself heard, and to good purpose. His courage and coolness propitiated some and exasperated others.

A group of very rough fellows pursued him, shouting and yelling, as he left the school-room where the meeting was held.

"Take care!" said McEwart, hurrying him along. "They are beginning with stones, and I see no police about."

The little party of visitors made for the coach, protected by some of the villagers. But in the dusk the stones came flying fast and freely. Just as Marsham was climbing into his seat he was struck. McEwart saw him waver, and heard a muttered exclamation.

"You're hurt!" he said, supporting him. "Let the groom drive."

Marsham pushed him away.

"It's nothing." He gathered up the reins, the grooms who had been holding the horses' heads clambered into their places, a touch of the whip, and the coach was off, almost at a gallop, pursued by a shower of missiles.

After a mile at full speed Marsham pulled in the horses, and handed the reins to the groom. As he did so a low groan escaped him.

"You *are* hurt!" exclaimed McEwart. "Where did they hit you?"

Marsham shook his head.

"Better not talk," he said, in a whisper. "Drive home."

An hour afterward, it was announced to the crowded gathering in the Dunscombe Corn Exchange that Mr. Marsham had been hurt by a stone at Hartingfield, and could not address the meeting. The message was received with derision rather than sympathy. It was universally believed that the injury was a mere excuse, and that the publication of that most damning letter, on the very eve of the poll, was the sole and only cause why the Junior Lord of the Treasury failed on this occasion to meet the serried rows of his excited countrymen, waiting for him in the packed and stifling hall.

It was the Vicar who took the news to Beechcote.

As in the case of Diana herself, the misfortune of the enemy instantly transformed a roaring lion into a sucking dove. Some instinct told him that she must hear it gently. He therefore invented an errand, saw Muriel Colwood, and left the tale with her—both of the blow and the letter.

Muriel, trembling inwardly, broke it as lightly and casually as she could. An injury to the spine—so it was reported. No doubt rest and treatment would soon amend it. A London surgeon had been sent for. Meanwhile the election was said to be lost. Muriel reluctantly produced the letter in the *West Brookshire Gazette*, knowing that in the natural course of things Diana must see it on the morrow.

Diana sat bowed over the letter and the news, and presently lifted up a white face, kissed Muriel, who was hovering round her, and begged to be left alone.

She went to her room. The windows were wide open to the woods, and the golden August moon shone above the down in its bare full majesty. Most of the night she sat crouched beside the window, her head resting on the ledge. Her whole nature hungered—and hungered—for Oliver. As she lifted her eyes, she saw the little dim path on the hill-side; she felt his arms round about her, his warm life against hers. Nothing that he had done, nothing that he could do, had torn him, or would ever tear him, from her heart. And now he was wounded—defeated—perhaps disgraced; and she could not help him, could not comfort him.

She supposed Alicia Drake was with him. For the first time a torment of fierce jealousy ran through her nature, like fire through a forest glade, burning up its sweetness.

CHAPTER XXI

"WHAT time is the carriage ordered for Mr. Nixon?" asked Marsham of his servant.

"Her ladyship, sir, told me to tell the stables four-twenty at Dunscombe."

"Let me hear directly the carriage arrives. And, Richard, go and see if the Dunscombe paper is come, and bring it up."

The footman disappeared. As soon as the door was shut Marsham sank back into his cushions with a stifled groan. He was lying on a sofa in his own sitting-room. A fire burned in the grate, and Marsham's limbs were covered with a rug. Yet it was only the first week of September, and the afternoon was warm and sunny. The neuralgic pain, however, from which he had suffered day and night since the attack upon him made him susceptible to the slightest breath of chill.

The footman returned with the newspaper.

"Is her ladyship at home?"

"I think not, sir. I saw her ladyship go out a little while ago with Miss Drake. Is there anything else I can get for you?"

"Make up the fire, please. Put the cigarettes here, and don't come till I ring."

Marsham, left alone, lit a cigarette, and fell hungrily upon the paper, his forehead and lips still drawn with pain. The paper contained an account of the stone-

throwing at Hartingfield, and of the injury to himself; a full record of the last five or six days of the election, and of the proceedings at the declaration of the poll; a report, moreover, of the "chivalrous and sympathetic references" made by the newly elected Conservative member to the "dastardly attack" upon his rival, which the "whole of West Brookshire condemns and deplores."

The leading article "condemned" and "deplored," at considerable length and in good set terms, through two paragraphs. In the third it "could not disguise—from itself or its readers"—that Mr. Marsham's defeat by so large a majority had been a strong probability from the first, and had been made a certainty by the appearance on the eve of the poll of "the Barrington letter." "No doubt, some day, Mr. Marsham will give his old friends and former constituents in this division the explanations in regard to this letter—taken in connection with his own repeated statements at meetings and in the press—which his personal honor and their long fidelity seem to demand. Meanwhile we can only express to our old member our best wishes both for his speedy recovery from the effects of a cowardly and disgraceful attack, and for the restoration of a political position which only a few months ago seemed so strong and so full of promise."

Marsham put down the paper. He could see the whipper-snapper of an editor writing the lines, with a wary eye both to the past and future of the Marsham influence in the division. The self-made, shrewd little man had been Oliver's political slave and henchman through two Parliaments; and he had no doubt reflected that neither the Tallyn estates, nor the Marsham wealth had been wiped out by the hostile majority of last

Saturday. At the same time, the state of feeling in the division was too strong; the paper which depended entirely on local support could not risk its very existence by countering it.

Marsham's keen brain spared him nothing. His analysis of his own situation, made at leisure during the week which had elapsed since the election, had been as pitiless and as acute as that of any opponent could have been. He knew exactly what he had lost, and why.

A majority of twelve hundred against him, in a constituency where, up to the dissolution, he had commanded a majority—for him—of fifteen hundred. And that at a general election, when his party was sweeping the country!

He had, of course, resigned his office, and had received a few civil and sympathetic words from the Premier—words which but for his physical injury, so the recipient of them suspected, might have been a good deal less civil and less sympathetic. No effort had been made to delay the decision. For a Cabinet Minister, defeated at a bye-election, a seat must be found. For a Junior Lord and a Second Whip nobody will put themselves out.

He was, therefore, out of Parliament and out of office; estranged from multitudes of old friends; his name besmirched by some of the most damaging accusations that can be brought against a man's heart and honor.

He moved irritably among his cushions, trying to arrange them more comfortably. This *infernal* pain! It was to be hoped Nixon would be able to do more for it than that ass, the Dunscombe doctor. Marsham thought, with resentment, of all his futile drugs and expedients.

According to the Dunscombe man, the stone had done no vital injury, but had badly bruised one of the lower vertebræ, and jarred the nerves of the spine generally. Local rest, various applications, and nerve-soothing drugs—all these had been freely used, and with no result. The pain had been steadily growing worse, and in the last twenty-four hours certain symptoms had appeared, which, when he first noticed them, had roused in Marsham a gust of secret terror; and Nixon, a famous specialist in nerve and spinal disease, had been summoned forthwith.

To distract his thoughts, Marsham took up the paper again.

What was wrong with the light? He looked at the clock, and read it with some difficulty. Close on four only, and the September sun was shining brightly outside. It was his eyes, he supposed, that were not quite normal. Very likely. A nervous shock must, of course, show itself in a variety of ways. At any rate, he found reading difficult, and the paper slid away.

The pain, however, would not let him doze. He looked helplessly round the room, feeling depressed and wretched. Why were his mother and Alicia out so long? They neglected and forgot him. Yet he could not but remember that they had both devoted themselves to him in the morning, had read to him and written for him, and he had not been a very grateful patient. He recalled, with bitterness, the look of smiling relief with which Alicia had sprung up at the sound of the luncheon-bell, dropping the book from which she had been reading aloud, and the little song he had heard her humming in the corridor as she passed his door on her way downstairs.

She was in no pain physical or mental, and she had probably no conception of what he had endured these six days and nights. But one would have thought that mere instinctive sympathy with the man to whom she was secretly engaged.

For they were secretly engaged. It was during one of their early drives, in the canvassing of the first election, that he had lost his head one June afternoon, as they found themselves alone, crossing a beech wood on one of the private roads of the Tallyn estate; the groom having been despatched on a message to a farm-house. Alicia was in her most daring and provocative mood, tormenting and flattering him by turns; the reflections from her rose-colored parasol dappling her pale skin with warm color; her beautiful ungloved hands and arms, bare to the elbow, teasing the senses of the man beside her. Suddenly he had thrown his arm round her, and crushed her to him, kissing the smooth cool face and the dazzling hair. And she had nestled up to him and laughed—not the least abashed or astonished; so that even then, through his excitement, there had struck a renewed and sharp speculation as to her twenty-four hours' engagement to the Curate, in the spring of the year; as to the privileges she must have allowed him; and no doubt to others before him.

At that time, it was tacitly understood between them that no engagement could be announced. Alicia was well aware that Brookshire was looking on; that Brookshire was on the side of Diana Mallory, the forsaken, and was not at all inclined to forgive either the deserting lover or the supplanting damsel; so that while she was not loath to sting and mystify Brookshire by whatever small signs of her power over Oliver Marsham she could

devise; though she queened it beside him on his coach, and took charge with Lady Lucy of his army of women canvassers; though she faced the mob with him at Hartingfield, on the occasion of the first disturbance there in June, and had stood beside him, vindictively triumphant on the day of his first hard-won victory, she would wear no ring, and she baffled all inquiries, whether of her relations or her girl friends. Her friendship with her cousin Oliver was nobody's concern but her own, she declared, and all they both wanted was to be let alone.

Meanwhile she had been shaken and a little frightened by the hostile feeling shown toward her, no less than Oliver, in the first election. She had taken no part in the second, although she had been staying at Tallyn all through it, and was present when Oliver was brought in, half fainting and agonized with pain, after the Hartingfield riot.

Oliver, now lying with closed eyes on his sofa, lived again through the sensations and impressions of that first hour: the pain—the arrival of the doctor—the injection of morphia—the blessed relief stealing through his being —and then Alicia's face beside him. Delivered from the obsession of intolerable anguish, he had been free to notice with a kind of exultation the tears in the girl's eyes, her pale tremor and silence. Never yet had Alicia wept for *him* or anything that concerned him. Never, indeed, had he seen her weep in his whole life before. He triumphed in her tears.

Since then, however, their whole relation had insensibly and radically changed; their positions toward each other were reversed. Till the day of his injury and his defeat, Marsham had been in truth the wooed and Alicia

the wooer. Now it seemed to him as though, through his physical pain, he were all the time clinging to something that shrank away and resisted him—something that would ultimately elude and escape him.

He knew well that Alicia liked sickness and melancholy no more than he did; and he was constantly torn between a desire to keep her near him and a perception that to tie her to his sick-room was, in fact, the worst of policies.

Persistently, in the silence of the hot room, there rang through his brain the questions: "Do I really care whether she stays or goes?—do I love her?—shall I ever marry her?" Questions that were immediately answered, it seemed, by the rise of a wave of desolate and desperate feeling. He was maimed and ruined; life had broken under his feet. What if also he were done forever with love and marriage?

There were still some traces in his veins of the sedative drug which had given him a few hours' sleep during the night. Under its influence a feverish dreaminess overtook him, alive with fancies and images. Ferrier and Diana were among the phantoms that peopled the room. He saw Ferrier come in, stoop over the newspaper on the floor, raise it, and walk toward the fire with it. The figure stood with its back to him; then suddenly it turned, and Marsham saw the well-known face, intent, kindly, a little frowning, as though in thought, but showing no consciousness of his, Oliver's, presence or plight. He himself wished to speak, but was only aware of useless effort and some intangible hinderance. Then Ferrier moved on toward a writing-table with drawers that stood beyond the fireplace. He stooped, and touched a handle. "No!" cried Oliver,

violently—"no!" He woke with shock and distress, his pulse racing. But the feverish state began again, and dreams with it—of the House of Commons, the election, the faces in the Hartingfield crowd. Diana was among the crowd—looking on—vaguely beautiful and remote. Yet as he perceived her a rush of cool air struck on his temples, he seemed to be walking down a garden, there was a scent of limes and roses.

"Oliver!" said his mother's voice beside him—"dear Oliver!"

He roused himself to find Lady Lucy bending over him. The pale dismay in her face excited and irritated him.

He turned away from her.

"Is Nixon come?"

"Dearest, he has just arrived. Will you see him at once?"

"Of course!" he said, angrily. "Why doesn't Richard do as he's told?"

He raised himself into a sitting posture, while Lady Lucy went to the door. The local doctor entered—a stranger behind him. Lady Lucy left her son and the great surgeon together.

Nearly an hour later, Mr. Nixon, waylaid by Lady Lucy, was doing his best to compromise, as doctors must, between consideration for the mother and truth as to the son. There was, he hoped, no irreparable injury. But the case would be long, painful, trying to everybody concerned. Owing to the mysterious nerve-sympathies of the body, the sight was already affected and would be more so. Complete rest, certain mechanical applications, certain drugs—he ran through his recommendations.

"Avoid morphia, I implore you," he said, earnestly, "if you possibly can. Here a man's friends can be of great help to him. Cheer him and distract him in every way you can. I think we shall be able to keep the pain within bounds."

Lady Lucy looked piteously at the speaker.

"And how long?" she said, trembling.

Mr. Nixon hesitated. "I am afraid I can hardly answer that. The blow was a most unfortunate one. It might have done a worse injury. Your son might be now a paralyzed invalid for life. But the case is very serious, nor is it possible yet to say what all the consequences of the injury may be. But keep your own courage up—and his. The better his general state, the more chance he has."

A few minutes more, and the brougham had carried him away. Lady Lucy, looking after it from the window of her sitting-room, knew that for her at last what she had been accustomed to describe every Sunday as "the sorrows of this transitory life" had begun. Till now they had been as veiled shapes in a misty distance. She had accepted them with religious submission, as applying to others. Her mind, resentful and astonished, must now admit them — pale messengers of powers unseen and pitiless!—to its own daily experience; must look unprotected, unscreened, into their stern faces.

"John!—John!" cried the inner voice of agonized regret. And then: "My boy!—my boy!"

"What did he say?" asked Alicia's voice, beside her.

The sound — the arm thrown round her — were not very welcome to Lady Lucy. Her nature, imperious and jealously independent, under all her sweetness of manner,

set itself against pity, especially from her juniors. She composed herself at once.

"He does not give a good account," she said, withdrawing herself gently but decidedly. "It may take a long time before Oliver is quite himself again."

Alicia persisted in a few questions, extracting all the information she could. Then Lady Lucy sat down at her writing-table and began to arrange some letters. Alicia's presence annoyed her. The truth was that she was not as fond of Alicia as she had once been. These misfortunes, huddling one on another, instead of drawing them together, had in various and subtle ways produced a secret estrangement. To neither the older nor the younger woman could the familiar metaphor have been applied which compares the effects of sorrow or sympathy on fine character to the bruising of fragrant herbs. Ferrier's death, sorely and bitterly lamented though it was, had not made Lady Lucy more lovable. Oliver's misfortune had not—toward Lady Lucy, at any rate—liberated in Alicia those hidden tendernesses that may sometimes transmute and glorify natures apparently careless or stubborn, brought eye to eye with pain. Lady Lucy also resented her too long exclusion from Alicia's confidence. Like all the rest of the world, she believed there was an understanding between Oliver and Alicia. Of course, there were reasons for not making anything of the sort public at present. But a mother, she thought, ought to have been told.

"Does Mr. Nixon recommend that Oliver should go abroad for the winter?" asked Alicia, after a pause. She was sitting on the arm of a chair, her slender feet hanging, and the combination of her blue linen dress with the fiery gold of her hair reminded Lady Lucy of the evening

in the Eaton Square drawing-room, when she had first entertained the idea that Alicia and Oliver might marry. Oliver, standing erect in front of the fire looking down upon Alicia in her blue tulle—his young vigor and distinction—the carriage of his handsome head—was she never to see that sight again—never? Her heart fluttered and sank; the prison of life contracted round her.

She answered, rather shortly.

"He made no plan of the kind. Travelling, in fact, is absolutely forbidden for the present."

"Poor Oliver!" said Alicia, gently, her eyes on the ground. "How *horrid* it is that I have to go away!"

"You! When?" Lady Lucy turned sharply to look at the speaker.

"Oh! not till Saturday," said Alicia, hastily; "and of course I shall come back again — if you want me." She looked up with a smile.

"Oliver will certainly want you; I don't know whom he could — possibly — want — so much." Lady Lucy spoke the words with slow emphasis.

"Dear old boy!—I know," murmured Alicia. "I needn't be long away."

"Why must you go at all? I am sure the Treshams —Lady Evelyn—would understand—"

"Oh, I promised so faithfully!" pleaded Alicia, joining her hands. "And then, you know, I should be able to bring all sorts of gossip back to Oliver to amuse him."

Lady Lucy pressed her hand to her eyes in a miserable bewilderment. "I suppose it will be an immense party. You told me, I think, that Lady Evelyn had asked Lord Philip Darcy. I should be glad if you would make her understand that neither I, nor Sir James Chide, nor any other old friend of Mr. Ferrier can ever meet

that man on friendly terms again." She looked up, her wrinkled cheeks flushed with color, her aspect threatening and cold.

"Of course!" said Alicia, soothingly. "Hateful man! I too loathe the thought of meeting him. But you know how delicate Evelyn is, and how she has been depending on me to help her. Now, oughtn't we to go back to Oliver?" She rose from her chair.

"Mr. Nixon left some directions to which I must attend," said Lady Lucy, turning to her desk. "Will you go and read to him?"

Alicia moved away, but paused as she neared the door.

"What did Mr. Nixon say about Oliver's eyes? He has been suffering from them dreadfully to-day."

"Everything is connected. We can only wait."

"Are you—are you thinking of a nurse?"

"No," said Lady Lucy, decidedly. "His man Richard is an excellent nurse. I shall never leave him—and you say"—she turned pointedly to look at Alicia—"you say you will come back?"

"Of course!—of course I will come back!" cried Alicia. Then, stepping up briskly to Lady Lucy, she stooped and kissed her. "And there is you to look after, too!"

Lady Lucy allowed the kiss, but made no reply to the remark. Alicia departed.

She went slowly up the wide oak staircase. How stifling the house was on this delicious afternoon! Suddenly, in the distance, she heard the sound of guns—a shooting-party, no doubt, in the Melford woods. Her feet danced under her, and she gave a sigh of longing for the stubbles and the sunny fields, and the companionship

of handsome men, of health and vigor as flawless and riotous as her own.

Oliver was lying still, with closed eyes, when she rejoined him. He made no sign as she opened the door, and she sank down on a stool beside him and laid her head against his shoulder.

"Dear Oliver, you must cheer up," she said, softly. "You'll be well soon—quite soon—if you are only patient."

He made no reply.

"Did you like Mr. Nixon?" she asked, in the same caressing voice, gently rubbing her cheek against his arm.

"One doesn't exactly like one's executioner," he said, hoarsely and suddenly, but without opening his eyes.

"Oliver!—dearest!" She dropped a protesting kiss on the sleeve of his coat.

Silence for a little. Alicia felt as if she could hardly breathe in the hot room. Then Oliver raised himself.

"I am going blind!"—he said, violently. "And nothing can be done. Did that man tell my mother that?"

"No, no!—Oliver!" She threw her arm round him, hastily repeating and softening Nixon's opinion.

He sank back on his cushions, gloomily listening—without assent. Presently he shook his head.

"The stuff that doctors talk when they can do no good, and want to get comfortably out of the house! Alicia!"

She bent forward startled.

"Alicia!—are you going to stick to me?"

His eyes held her.

"Oliver!—what a cruel question!"

"No, it is not cruel." He spoke with a decision which took no account of her caresses. "I ought to give you

up—I know that perfectly well. But I tell you frankly I shall have no motive to get well if you leave me. I think that man told me the truth—I did my best to make him. There *is* a chance of my getting well—the thing is *not* hopeless. If you'll stand by me, I'll fight through. Will you?" He looked at her with a threatening and painful eagerness.

"Of course I will," she said, promptly.

"Then let us tell my mother to-night that we are engaged? Mind, I am not deceiving you. I would give you up at once if I were hopelessly ill. I am only asking you to bear a little waiting—and wretchedness—for my sake."

"I will bear anything. Only, dear Oliver—for your sake—for mine—wait a little longer! You know what horrible gossip there's been!" She clung to him, murmuring: "I couldn't bear that anybody should speak or think harshly of you now. It can make no difference to you and me, but two or three months hence everybody would take it so differently. You know we said in June—six months."

Her voice was coaxing and sweet. He partly withdrew himself from her, however.

"At least, you can tell my mother," he said, insisting. "Of course, she suspects it all."

"Oh, but, dear Oliver!"—she brought her face nearer to his, and he saw the tears in her eyes—"one's own mother ought to know first of all. Mamma would be so hurt—she would never forgive me. Let me pay this horrid visit—and then go home and tell my people—if you really, really wish it. Afterward of course, I shall come back to you—and Cousin Lucy shall know—and at Christmas—everybody."

"What visit? You *are* going to Eastham?—to the Tresham's?" It was a cry of incredulous pain.

"How *can* I get out of it, dear Oliver? Evelyn has been *so* ill!—and she's been depending on me—and I owe her so much. You know how good she was to me in the Season."

He lifted himself again on his cushions, surveying her ironically—his eyes sunken and weak—his aspect ghastly.

"Well, how long do you mean to stay? Is Lord Philip going to be there?"

"What do I care whether he is or not!"

"You said you were longing to know him."

"That was before you were ill."

"I don't see any logic in that remark." He lay looking at her. Then suddenly he put out an arm, pulled her down to him feebly, and kissed her. But the movement hurt him. He turned away with some broken words—or, rather, moans—stifled against his pillows.

"Dear, do lie still. Shall I read to you?"

He shook his head.

"Don't stay with me. I shall be better after dinner."

She rose obediently, touched him caressingly with her hand, drew a light shawl over him, and stole away.

When she reached her own room she stood a moment, frowning and absorbed, beside the open window. Then some one knocked at her door. It was her maid, who came in carrying a large light box.

Alicia flew toward her.

"From Cosette! Heavens! Oh, Benson, quick! Put it down. I'll help you."

The maid obeyed, and ran to the dressing-table for

scissors. Cords and tapes were soon cut in the hurry of unpacking, and from the crackling tissue-paper there emerged an evening gown of some fresh snowy stuff, delicately painted and embroidered, which drew from the maid little shrieks of admiration.

Alicia looked at it more critically.

"The lace is not good enough," she said, twisting her lip, "and I shall make her give me some more embroidery than that on the bodice—for the money—I can tell her! However, it is pretty—much prettier, isn't it, Benson, than that gown of Lady Evelyn's I took it from? She'll be jealous!" The girl laughed triumphantly. "Well, now, look here, Benson, we're going on Saturday, and I want to look through my gowns. Get them out, and I'll see if there's anything I can send home."

The maid's face fell.

"I packed some of them this morning, miss—in the large American trunk. I thought they'd keep better there than anywhere. It took a lot of time."

"Oh, never mind. You can easily pack them again. I really must go through them."

The maid unwillingly obeyed; and soon the room—bed, sofa, chairs — was covered with costly gowns, for all hours of the day and night: walking-dresses, in autumn stuffs and colors, ready for the moors and stubbles; afternoon frocks of an elaborate simplicity, expensively girlish; evening dresses in an amazing variety of hue and fabric; with every possible adjunct in the way of flowers, gloves, belt, that dressmakers and customer could desire.

Alicia looked at it all with glowing cheeks. She reflected that she had really spent the last check she had

made her father give her to very great advantage. There were very few people of her acquaintance, girls or married women, who knew how to get as much out of money as she did.

In her mind she ran over the list of guests invited to the Eastham party, as her new friend Lady Evelyn had confided it to her. Nothing could be smarter, but the competition among the women would be terribly keen. "Of course, I can't touch duchesses," she thought, laughing to herself, "or American millionaires. But I shall do!"

And her mind ran forward in a dream of luxury and delight. She saw herself sitting or strolling in vast rooms amid admiring groups; mirrors reflected her; she heard the rustle of her gowns on parquet or marble, the merry sound of her own laughter; other girls threw her the incense of their envy and imitation; and men, fresh and tanned from shooting, breathing the joy of physical life, devoted themselves to her pleasure, or encircled her with homage. Not always chivalrous, or delicate, or properly behaved—these men of her imagination! What matter? She loved adventures! And moving like a king among the rest, she saw the thin, travel-beaten, eccentric form of Lord Philip—the hated, adored, pursued; Society's idol and bugbear all in one; Lord Philip, who shunned and disliked women; on whom, nevertheless, the ambitions and desires of some of the loveliest women in England were, on that account alone, and at this moment of his political triumph, the more intently and the more greedily fixed.

A flash of excitement ran through her. In Lady Evelyn's letter of that morning there was a mention of Lord Philip. "I told him you were to be here. He

made a note of it, and I do at last believe he won't throw us over, as he generally does."

She dressed, still in a reverie, speechless under her maid's hands. Then, as she emerged upon the gallery, looking down upon the ugly hall of Tallyn, she remembered that she had promised to go back after dinner and read to Oliver. Her nature rebelled in a moral and physical nausea, and it was all she could do to meet Lady Lucy at their solitary dinner with her usual good temper.

CHAPTER XXII

SIR JAMES CHIDE was giving tea to a couple of guests at Lytchett Manor. It was a Saturday in late September. The beech-trees visible through the drawing-room windows were still untouched and heavily green; but their transformation was approaching. Soon, steeped in incredible splendors of orange and gold, they would stand upon the leaf-strewn grass, waiting for the night of rain or the touch of frost which should at last disrobe them.

"If you imagine, Miss Ettie," said Sir James, severely, to a young lady beside him, "that I place the smallest faith in any of Bobbie's remarks or protestations—"

The girl addressed smiled into his face, undaunted. She was a small elfish creature with a thin face, on the slenderest of necks. But in her queer little countenance a pair of laughing eyes, out of all proportion to the rest of her for loveliness and effect, gave her and kept her the attention of the world. They lent distinction—fascination even—to a character of simple virtues and girlish innocence.

Bobbie lounged behind her chair, his arms on the back of it. He took Sir James's attack upon him with calm. "Shall I show him the letter of my beastly chairman?" he said, in the girl's ear.

She nodded, and Bobbie drew from his breast-pocket

a folded sheet of blue paper, and pompously handed it to Sir James.

The letter was from the chairman of a leading bank in Berlin—a man well known in European finance. It was couched in very civil terms, and contained the offer to Mr. Robert Forbes of a post in the Lindner bank, as an English correspondence clerk, at a salary in marks which, when translated, meant about £140 a year.

Sir James read it, and handed it back. "Well, what's the meaning of that?"

"I'm giving up the Foreign Office," said Bobbie, with an engaging openness of manner. "It's not a proper place for a young man. I've learned nothing there but a game we do with Blue-Books, and things you throw at the ceiling—where they stick—I'll tell you about it presently. Besides, you see, I must have some money, and it don't grow in the Foreign Office for people like me. So I went to my uncle, Lord Forestier—"

"Of course!" growled Sir James. "I thought we should come to the uncles before long. Miss Wilson, I desire to warn you against marrying a young man of 'the classes.' They have no morals, but they have always uncles."

Miss Wilson's eyes shot laughter at her *fiancé*. "Go on, Bobbie, and don't make it too long!"

"I decline to be hustled." Bobbie's tone was firm, though urbane. "I repeat: I went to my uncle. And I said to him, like the unemployed: 'Find me work, and none of your d——d charity!'"

"Which means, I suppose, that the last time you went to him, you borrowed fifty pounds?" said Sir James.

"I shouldn't dream, sir, of betraying my uncle's af-

fairs. On this occasion—for an uncle—he behaved well. He lectured me for twenty-seven minutes and a half—I had made up my mind beforehand not to let it go over the half-hour—and then he came to business. After a year's training and probation in Berlin he thought he could get me a post in his brother-in-law's place in the City. Awfully warm thing, you know," said Bobbie, complacently; "worth a little trouble. So I told him, kindly, I'd think of it. Ecco!" He pointed to the letter. "Of course, I told my uncle I should permit him to continue my allowance, and in a year I shall be a merchant prince—in the egg; I shall be worth marrying; and I shall allow Ettie two hundred a year for her clothes."

"And Lady Niton?"

Bobbie sat down abruptly; the girl stared at the carpet.

"I don't see the point of your remark," said Bobbie at last, with mildness. "When last I had the honor of hearing of her, Lady Niton was taking the air—or the waters—at Strathpeffer."

"As far as I know," remarked Sir James, "she is staying with the Feltons, five miles off, at this moment."

Bobbie whistled. "Close quarters!" He looked at Miss Ettie Wilson, and she at him. "May I ask whether, as soon as Ettie and I invited ourselves for the day, you asked Lady Niton to come to tea?"

"Not at all. I never play Providence unless I'm told to do so. Only Miss Mallory is coming to tea."

Bobbie expressed pleasure at the prospect; then his amiable countenance—the face of an "Idle Apprentice," whom no god has the heart to punish — sobered to a real concern as the association of ideas led him to inquire what the latest news might be of Oliver Marsham.

Sir James shook his head; his look clouded. He understood from Lady Lucy that Oliver was no better; the accounts, in fact, were very bad.

"Did they arrest anybody?" asked Bobbie.

"At Hartingfield? Yes—two lads. But there was not evidence enough to convict. They were both released, and the village gave them an ovation."

Bobbie hesitated.

"What do you think was the truth about that article?"

Sir James frowned and rose.

"Miss Wilson, come and see my garden. If you don't fall down and worship the peaches on my south wall, I shall not pursue your acquaintance."

It was a Saturday afternoon. Briefs were forgotten. The three strolled down the garden. Sir James, in a disreputable shooting-coat and cap, his hands deep in his pockets, took the middle of the path—the two lovers on either side. Chide made himself delightful to them. On that Italian journey of which he constantly thought, Ferrier had been amused and cheered all through by Bobbie's nonsense; and the young fellow had loyally felt his death—and shown it. Chide's friendly eye would be on him and his Ettie henceforward.

Five or ten minutes afterward, a brougham drove up to the door of Lytchett, and a small lady emerged. She had rung the bell, and was waiting on the steps, when a pony-carriage also turned into the Lytchett avenue and drew near rapidly.

A girl in a shady hat was driving it.

"The very creature!" cried Lady Niton, under her breath, smartly tapping her tiny boot with the black cane she carried, and referring apparently to some train

"SIR JAMES MADE HIMSELF DELIGHTFUL TO THEM"

of meditation in which she had been just engaged. She waved to her own coachman to be off, and stood awaiting Diana.

"How do you do, Miss Mallory? Are you invited? I'm not."

Diana descended, and they shook hands. They had not met since the evening at Tallyn when Diana, in her fresh beauty, had been the gleaming princess, and Lady Niton the friendly godmother, of so promising a fairy tale. The old woman looked at her curiously, as they stood in the drawing-room together, while the footman went off to find Sir James. Frail—dark lines under the eyes—a look as of long endurance—a smile that was a mere shield and concealment for the heart beneath—alack!

And there was no comfort to be got out of calling down fire from heaven on the author of this change, since it had fallen so abundantly already!

"Sit down; you look tired," said the old lady, in her piping, peremptory voice. "Have you been here all the summer?"

"Yes—since June."

"Through the election?"

"Yes." Diana turned her face away. Lady Niton could see the extreme delicacy to which the profile had fined down, the bluish or purple shadows here and there on the white skin. Something glittered in the old woman's eyes. She put out a hand from the queer flounced mantle, made out of an ancient evening dress, in which she was arrayed, and touched Diana's.

"You know—you've heard—about those poor things at Tallyn?"

Diana made a quick movement. Her eyes were on the speaker.

"How is Mr. Marsham?"

Lady Niton shook her head. She opened a hand-bag on her wrist, took out a letter, and put on her eye-glasses.

"This is Lucy—arrived this morning. It don't sound well. 'Come when you can, my dear Elizabeth—you will be very welcome. But I do not know how I have the courage to ask you. We are a depressing pair, Oliver and I. Oliver has been in almost constant pain this last week. If it goes on we must try morphia. But before that we shall see another doctor. I dread to think of morphia. Once begin it, and what will be the end? I sit here alone a great deal—thinking. How long did that stone take to throw?—a few seconds, perhaps? And here is my son—my poor son!—broken and helpless—perhaps for life. We have been trying a secretary to write for him and read to him, for the blindness increases, but it has not been a success.'"

Diana rose abruptly and walked to the window, where she stood, motionless—looking out—her back turned to Lady Niton. Her companion glanced at her—lifted her eyebrows—hesitated—and finally put the letter back into her pocket. There was an awkward silence, when Diana suddenly returned to Lady Niton's side.

"Where is Miss Drake?" she said, sharply. "Is the marriage put off?"

"Marriage!" Lady Niton laughed. "Alicia and Oliver? H'm. I don't think we shall hear much more of that!"

"I thought it was settled."

"Well, as soon as I heard of the accident and Oliver's condition, I wondered to myself how long that young woman would keep it up. I have no doubt the situation gave her a disturbed night or two. Alicia never can have

had the smallest intention of spending her life, or the best years of it, in nursing a sick husband. On the other hand, money is money. So she went off to the Treshams', to see if there was no third course—that's how I read it."

"The Treshams'?—a visit?—since the accident?"

"Don't look so astonished, my dear. You don't know the Alicias of this world. But I admit we should be dull without them. There's a girl at the Feltons' who has just come down from the Treshams', and I wouldn't have missed her stories of Alicia for a great deal. She's been setting her cap, it appears, at Lord Philip. However" (Lady Niton chuckled), "*there* she's met her match."

"But they *are* engaged?" said Diana, in bewildered interrogation.

The little lady's laugh rang out—shrill and cracked—like the crow of a bantam.

"She and Lord Philip? Trust Lord Philip!"

"No, I didn't mean that!"

"She and Oliver? I've no doubt Oliver thinks—or thought—they were. What view he takes now, poor fellow, I'm sure I don't know. But I don't somehow think Alicia will be able to carry on the game indefinitely. Lady Lucy is losing patience."

Diana sat in silence. Lady Niton could not exactly decipher her. But she guessed at a conflict between a scrupulous or proud unwillingness to discuss the matter at all or hear it discussed, and some motive deeper still and more imperative.

"Lady Lucy has been ill too?" Diana inquired at last, in the same voice of constraint.

"Oh, very unwell indeed. A poor, broken thing! And there don't seem to be anybody to look after them.

Mrs. Fotheringham is about as much good as a broomstick. Every family ought to keep a supply of superfluous girls. They're like the army—useless in peace and indispensable in war. Ha! here's Sir James."

Both ladies perceived Sir James, coming briskly up the garden path. As she saw him a thought struck Diana—a thought which concerned Lady Niton. It broke down the tension of her look, and there was the gleam of a smile—sad still, and touching—in the glance she threw at her companion. She had been asked to tea to meet a couple of guests from London with whose affairs she was well acquainted; and she too thought Sir James had been playing Providence.

Sir James, evidently conscious, saw the raillery in her face, pinched her fingers as she gave him her hand, and Diana, passing him, escaped to the garden, very certain that she should find the couple in question somewhere among its shades.

Lady Niton examined Sir James—looked after Diana.

"Look here!" she said, abruptly; "what's up? You two understand something I don't. Out with it!"

Sir James, who could always blush like a girl, blushed.

"I vow that I am as innocent as a babe unborn!"

"What of?" The tone of the demand was like that of a sword in the drawing.

"I have some guests here to-day."

"Who are they?"

"A young man you know—a young woman you would like to know."

Silence. Lady Niton sat down again.

"Kindly ring the bell," she said, lifting a peremptory hand, "and send for my carriage."

"Let me parley an instant," said Sir James, moving

between her and the bell. "Bobbie is just off to Berlin. Won't you say good-bye to him?"

"Mr. Forbes's movements are entirely indifferent to me—ring!" Then, shrill-voiced—and with sudden fury, like a bird ruffling up: "Berlin, indeed! More waste—more shirking! He needn't come to me! I won't give him another penny."

"I don't advise you to offer it," said Sir James, with suavity. "Bobbie has got a post in Berlin through his uncle, and is going off for a twelvemonth to learn banking."

Lady Niton sat blinking and speechless. Sir James drew the muslin curtain back from the window.

"There they are, you see—Bobbie—and the Explanation. And if you ask me, I think the Explanation explains."

Lady Niton put up her gold-rimmed glasses.

"She is not in the least pretty!" she said, with hasty venom, her old hand shaking.

"No, but fetching—and a good girl. She worships her Bobbie, and she's sending him away for a year."

"I won't allow it!" cried Lady Niton. "He sha'n't go."

Sir James shrugged his shoulders.

"These are domestic brawls—I decline them. Ah!" He turned to the window, opening it wide. She did not move. He made a sign, and two of the three persons who had just appeared on the lawn came running toward the house. Diana loitered behind.

Lady Niton looked at the two young faces as they reached her side—the mingling of laughter and anxiety in the girl's, of pride and embarrassment in Bobbie's.

"You sha'n't go to Berlin!" she said to him, vehemently, as she just allowed him to take her hand.

"Dear Lady Niton!—I must."

"You sha'n't!—I tell you! I've got you a place in London—a thousand times better than your fool of an uncle could ever get you. Uncle, indeed! Read that letter!" She tossed him one from her bag.

Bobbie read, while Lady Niton stared hard at the girl. Presently Bobbie began to gasp.

"Well, upon my word!"—he put the letter down—"upon my word!" He turned to his sweetheart. "Ettie!—you marry me in a month!—mind that! Hang Berlin! I scorn their mean proposals. London requires me." He drew himself up. "But first" (he looked at Lady Niton, his flushed face twitching a little) "justice!" he said, peremptorily—"justice on the chief offender."

And walking across to her, he stooped and kissed her. Then he beckoned to Ettie to do the same. Very shyly the girl ventured; very stoically the victim submitted. Whereupon, Bobbie subsided, sitting cross-legged on the floor, and a violent quarrel began immediately between him and Lady Niton on the subject of the part of London in which he and Ettie were to live. Fiercely the conflict waxed and waned, while the young girl's soft irrepressible laughter filled up all the gaps, and like a rushing stream carried away the detritus—the tempers and rancors and scorns—left by former convulsions.

Meanwhile, Diana and Sir James paced the garden. He saw that she was silent and absent-minded, and guessed uneasily at the cause. It was impossible that any woman of her type, who had gone through the experience that she had, should remain unmoved by the accounts now current as to Oliver Marsham's state.

As they returned across the lawn to the house the two lovers came out to meet them. Sir James saw the look with which Diana watched them coming. It seemed to him one of the sweetest and one of the most piteous he had ever seen on a human face.

"I shall descend upon you next week," said Lady Niton, abruptly, as Diana made her farewells. "I shall be at Tallyn."

Diana did not reply. The little *fiancée* insisted on the right to take her to her pony-carriage, and kissed her tenderly before she let her go. Diana had already become as a sister to her and Bobbie, trusted in their secrets and advising in their affairs.

Lady Niton, standing by Sir James, looked after her.

"Well, there's only one thing in the world that girl wants, and I suppose nobody in their senses ought to help her to it."

"What do you mean?"

She murmured a few words in his ear.

"Not a bit of it!" said Sir James, violently. "I forbid it. Don't you go and put anything of the sort into her head. The young man I mean her to marry comes back from Nigeria this very day."

"She won't marry him!"

"We shall see."

Diana drove home through lanes suffused with sunset and rich with autumn. There had been much rain through September, and the deluged earth steamed under the return of the sun. Mists were rising from the stubbles, and wrapping the woods in sleep and purple. To her the beauty of it all was of a mask or pageant—seen from a distance across a plain or through a street-opening—

lovely and remote. All that was real—all that lived—was the image within the mind; not the great earth-show without.

As she passed through the village she fell in with the Roughsedges: the doctor, with his wide-awake on the back of his head, a book and a bulging umbrella under his arm; Mrs. Roughsedge, in a new shawl, and new bonnet-strings, with a prodigal flutter of side curls beside her ample countenance. Hugh, it appeared, was expected by an evening train. Diana begged that he might be brought up to see her some time in the course of the following afternoon. Then she drove on, and Mrs. Roughsedge was left staring discontentedly at her husband.

"I think she *was* glad, Henry?"

"Think it, my dear, if it does you any good," said the doctor, cheerfully.

When Diana reached home night had fallen—a moonlit night, through which all the shapes and even the colors of day were still to be seen or divined in a softened and pearly mystery. Muriel Colwood was not at home. She had gone to town, on one of her rare absences, to meet some relations. Diana missed her, and yet was conscious that even the watch of those kind eyes would —to-night—have added to the passionate torment of thought.

As she sat alone in the drawing-room after her short and solitary meal her nature bent and trembled under the blowing of those winds of fate, which, like gusts among autumn trees, have tested or strained or despoiled the frail single life since time began; winds of love and pity, of desire and memory, of anguish and of longing.

Only her dog kept her company. Sometimes she rose out of restlessness, and moved about the room, and the dog's eyes would follow her, dumbly dependent. The room was dimly lit; in the mirrors she saw now and then the ghostly passage of some one who seemed herself and not herself. The windows were open to a misty garden, waiting for moonrise; in the house all was silence; only from the distant road and village came voices sometimes of children, or the sounds of a barrel-organ, fragmentary and shrill.

Loneliness ached in her heart—spoke to her from the future. And five miles away Oliver, too, was lonely—and in pain. *Pain!*—the thought of it, as of something embodied and devilish, clutching and tearing at a man already crushed and helpless—gave her no respite. The tears ran down her cheeks as she moved to and fro, her hands at her breast.

Yet she was helpless. What could she do? Even if he were free from Alicia, even if he wished to recall her, how could he—maimed and broken—take the steps that could alone bring her to his side? If their engagement had subsisted, horror, catastrophe, the approach of death itself, could have done nothing to part them. Now, how was a man in such a plight to ask from a woman what yet the woman would pay a universe to give? And in the face of the man's silence, how could the woman speak?

No!—she began to see her life as the Vicar saw it: pledged to large causes, given to drudgeries—necessary, perhaps noble, for which the happy are not meant. This quiet shelter of Beechcote could not be hers much longer. If she was not to go to Oliver, impossible that she could live on in this rose-scented stillness of the old house

and garden, surrounded by comfort, tranquillity, beauty, while the agony of the world rang in her ears—wild voices! — speaking universal, terrible, representative things, yet in tones piteously dear and familiar, close, close to her heart. No; like Marion Vincent, she must take her life in her hands, offering it day by day to this hungry human need, not stopping to think, accepting the first task to her hand, doing it as she best could. Only so could she still her own misery; tame, silence her own grief; grief first and above all for Oliver, grief for her own youth, grief for her parents. She must turn to the poor in that mood she had in the first instance refused to allow the growth of in herself—the mood of one seeking an opiate, an anæsthetic. The scrubbing of hospital floors; the pacing of dreary streets on mechanical errands; the humblest obedience and routine; things that must be done, and in the doing of them deaden thought—these were what she turned to as the only means by which life could be lived.

Oliver!—No hope for him?—at thirty-six! His career broken — his ambition defeated. Nothing before him but the decline of power and joy; nights of barren endurance, separating days empty and tortured; all natural pleasures deadened and destroyed; the dying down of all the hopes and energies that make a man.

She threw herself down beside the open window, burying her face on her knees. Would they never let her go to him?—never let her say to him: "Oliver, take me!—you did love me once—what matters what came between us? That was in another world. Take my life—crush out of it any drop of comfort or of ease it can give you! Cruel, cruel—to refuse! It is mine to give and yours to spend!"

Juliet Sparling's daughter. There was the great con-

secrating, liberating fact! What claim had she to the ordinary human joys? What could the ordinary standards and expectations of life demand from her? Nothing!—nothing that could stem this rush of the heart to the beloved—the forsaken and suffering and overshadowed beloved. Her future?—she held it dross—apart from Oliver. Dear Sir James!—but he must learn to bear it—to admit that she stood alone, and must judge for herself. What possible bliss or reward could there ever be for her but just this: to be allowed to watch and suffer with Oliver—to bring him the invention, the patience, the healing divination of love? And if it were not to be hers, then what remained was to go down into the arena, where all that is ugliest and most piteous in life bleeds and gasps, and throw herself blindly into the fight. Perhaps some heavenly voice might still speak through it; perhaps, beyond its jar, some ineffable reunion might dawn—

"First a peace out of pain—then a light—then thy breast! . . ."

She trembled through and through. Restraining herself, she rose, and went to her locked desk, taking from it the closely written journal of her father's life, which had now been for months the companion of her thoughts, and of the many lonely moments in her days and nights. She opened on a passage tragically familiar to her:

"It is an April day. Everything is very still and balmy. The clouds are low, yet suffused with sun. They seem to be tangled among the olives, and all the spring green and flowering fruit trees are like embroidery on a dim yet shining background of haze, silvery and glistening in the sun, blue and purple in the shadows. The peach-trees in the olive garden throw up their pink spray among the shimmering gray leaf and beside the

gray stone walls. Warm breaths steal to me over the grass and through the trees; the last brought with it a strong scent of narcissus. A goat tethered to a young tree in the orchard has reared its front feet against the stem, and is nibbling at the branches. His white back shines amid the light spring shade.

"Far down through the trees I can see the sparkle of the waves—beyond, the broad plain of blue; and on the headland, a mile away, white foam is dashing.

"It is the typical landscape of the South, and of spring, the landscape, with only differences in detail, of Theocritus or Vergil, or the Greek anthologists, those most delicate singers of nature and the South. From the beginning it has filled man with the same joy, the same yearning, the same despair.

"In youth and happiness we *are* the spring—the young green —the blossom—the plashing waves. Their life is ours and one with ours.

"But in age and grief? There is no resentment, I think; no anger, as though a mourner resented the gayety around him; but, rather, a deep and melancholy wonder at the chasm that has now revealed itself between our life and nature. What does the breach mean?—the incurable dissonance and alienation? Are we greater than nature, or less? Is the opposition final, the prophecy of man's ultimate and hopeless defeat at the hands of nature?—or is it, in the Hegelian sense, the mere development of a necessary conflict, leading to a profounder and intenser unity? The old, old questions—stock possessions of the race, yet burned anew by life into the blood and brain of the individual.

"I see Diana in the garden with her nurse. She has been running to and fro, playing with the dog, feeding the goat. Now I see her sitting still, her chin on her hands, looking out to sea. She seems to droop; but I am sure she is not tired. It is an attitude not very natural to a child, especially to a child so full of physical health and vigor; yet she often falls into it.

"When I see it I am filled with dread. She knows nothing, yet the cloud seems to be upon her. Does she already ask herself questions—about her father—about this solitary life?

"Juliet was not herself—not in her full sane mind—when I promised her. That I know. But I could no more have refused the promise than water to her dying lips. One awful evening of fever and hallucination I had been sitting by her for a long time. Her thoughts, poor sufferer, had been full of *blood*—it is hard to write it—but there is the truth—a physical horror of blood—the blood in which her dress—the dress they

took from her, her first night in prison—was once steeped. She saw it everywhere, on her hands, the sheets, the walls; it was a nausea, an agony of brain and flesh; and yet it was, of course, but a mere symbol and shadow of the manifold agony she had gone through. I will not attempt to describe what I felt—what the man who knows that his neglect and selfishness drove her the first steps along this infernal road must feel to his last hour.—But at last we were able—the nurse and I—to soothe her a little. The nightmare lifted, we gave her food, and the nurse brushed her poor brown hair, and tied round it, loosely, the little black scarf she likes to wear. We lifted her on her pillows, and her white face grew calm, and so lovely—though, as we thought, very near to death. Her hair, which was cut in prison, had grown again a little—to her neck, and could not help curling. It made her look a child again—poor, piteous child!—so did the little scarf, tied under her chin—and the tiny proportions to which all her frame had shrunk.

"She lifted her face to mine, as I bent over her, kissed me, and asked for you. You were brought, and I took you on my knee, showing you pictures, to keep you quiet. But every other minute, almost, your eyes looked away from the book to her, with that grave considering look, as though a question were behind the look, to which your little brain could not yet give shape. My strange impression was that the question was there—in the mind—fully formed, like the Platonic 'ideas' in heaven; but that, physically, there was no power to make the word-copy that could have alone communicated it to us. Your mother looked at you in return, intently—quite still. When you began to get restless, I lifted you up to kiss her; you were startled, perhaps, by the cold of her face, and struggled away. A little color came into her cheeks; she followed you hungrily with her eyes as you were carried off; then she signed to me, and it was my hand that brushed away her tears.

"Immediately afterward she began to speak, with wonderful will and self-control, and she asked me that till you were grown up and knowledge became inevitable, I should tell you nothing. There was to be no talk of her, no picture of her, no letters. As far as possible, during your childhood and youth, she was to be to you as though she had never existed. What her thought was exactly she was too feeble to explain; nor was her mind strong enough to envisage all the consequences—to me, as well as to you—of what she proposed. No doubt it tortured her to think of you as growing up under the cloud of her name and fate, and with her natural and tragic impetuosity she asked what she did.

"'One day—there will come some one—who will love her—in spite of me. Then you and he—shall tell her.'

"I pointed out to her that such a course would mean that I must change my name and live abroad. Her eyes assented, with a look of relief. She knew that I had already developed the tastes of the nomad and the sun-worshipper, that I was a student, happy in books and solitude; and I have no doubt that the picture her mind formed at the moment of some such hidden life together, as we have actually led, you and I, since her death, soothed and consoled her. With her intense and poetic imagination, she knew well what had happened to us, as well as to herself.

"So here we are in this hermitage; and except in a few passing perfunctory words, I have never spoken to you of her. Whether what I have done is wise I cannot tell. I could not help it; and if I had broken my word, remorse would have killed me. I shall not die, however, without telling you—if only I have warning enough.

"But supposing there is no warning—then all that I write now, and much else, will be in your hands some day. There are moments when I feel a rush of comfort at the notion that I may never have to watch your face as you hear the story; there are others when the longing to hold you — child as you still are —against my heart, and feel your tears—your tears for her—mingling with mine, almost sweeps me off my feet.

"And when you grow older my task in all its aspects will be harder still. You have inherited her beauty on a larger, ampler scale, and the time will come for lovers. You will hear of your mother then for the first time; my mind trembles even now at the thought of it. For the story may work out ill, or well, in a hundred different ways; and what we did in love may one day be seen as an error and folly, avenging itself not on us, but on our child.

"Nevertheless, my Diana, if it had to be done again, it must still be done. Your mother, before she died, was tortured by no common pains of body and spirit. Yet she never thought of herself—she was tormented for us. If her vision was clouded, her prayer unwise—in that hour, no argument, no resistance was possible.

"The man who loves you will love you well, my child. You are not made to be lightly or faithlessly loved. He will carry you through the passage perilous if I am no longer there to help. To him—in the distant years—I commit you. On him be my blessing, and the blessing, too, of that poor ghost whose hands I seem to hold in mine as I write. Let him not be too proud to take it!"

Diana put down the book with a low sob that sounded through the quiet room. Then she opened the garden door and stepped on to the terrace. The night was cold but not frosty; there was a waning moon above the autumnal fulness of the garden and the woods.

A "spirit in her feet" impelled her. She went back to the house, found a cloak and hat, put out the lamps, and sent the servants to bed. Then noiselessly she once more undid the drawing-room door, and stole out into the garden and across the lawn. Soon she was in the lime-walk, the first yellow leaves crackling beneath her feet; then in the kitchen garden, where the apples shone dimly on the laden boughs, where sunflowers and dahlias and marigolds, tall white daisies and late roses—the ghosts of their daylight selves—dreamed and drooped under the moon; where the bees slept and only great moths were abroad. And so on to the climbing path and the hollows of the down. She walked quickly along the edge of it, through hanging woods of beech that clothed the hill-side. Sometimes the trees met in majestic darkness above her head, and the path was a glimmering mystery before her. Sometimes the ground broke away on her left—abruptly—in great chasms, torn from the hill-side, stripped of trees, and open to the stars. Down rushed the steep slopes to the plain, clad in the decaying leaf and mast of former years, and at the edges of these precipitous glades, or scattered at long intervals across them, great single trees emerged, the types and masters of the forest, their trunks, incomparably tall, and all their noble limbs, now thinly veiled by a departing leafage, drawn sharp, in black and silver, on the pale background of the chalk plain. Nothing so grandiose as these climbing beech woods of middle England!—by day,

as it were, some vast procession marching joyously over hill and dale to the music of the birds and the wind; and at night, a brooding host, silent yet animate, waiting the signal of the dawn.

Diana passed through them, drinking in the exaltation of their silence and their strength, yet driven on by the mere weakness and foolishness of love. By following the curve of the down she could reach a point on the hillside whence, on a rising ground to the north, Tallyn was visible. She hastened thither through the night. Once she was startled by a shot fired from a plantation near the path, trees began to rustle and dogs to bark, and she fled on, in terror lest the Tallyn keepers might discover her. Alack!—for whose pleasure were they watching now?

The trees fell back. She reached the bare shoulder of the down. Northward and eastward spread the plain; and on the low hill in front her eyes discerned the pale patch of Tallyn, flanked by the darkness of the woods. And in that dim front, a light—surely a light?—in an upper window. She sank down in a hollow of the chalk, her eyes upon the house, murmuring and weeping.

So she watched with Oliver, as once—at the moment of her sharpest pain—he had watched with her. But whereas in that earlier night everything was in the man's hands to will or to do, the woman felt herself now helpless and impotent. His wealth, his mother hedged him from her. And if not, he had forgotten her altogether for Alicia; he cared for her no more; it would merely add to his burden to be reminded of her. As to Alicia—the girl who could cruelly leave him there, in that house of torture, to go and dance and amuse herself—leave him in his pain, his mother in her sorrow—Diana's whole being

was shaken first with an anguish of resentful scorn, in which everything personal to herself disappeared. Then —by an immediate revulsion—the thought of Alicia was a thought of deliverance. Gone?—gone from between them?—the flaunting, triumphant, heartless face?

Suddenly it seemed to Diana that she was there beside him, in the darkened room—that he heard her, and looked up.

"Diana!"

"Oliver!" She knelt beside him—she raised his head on her breast—she whispered to him; and at last he slept. Then hostile forms crowded about her, forbidding her, driving her away—even Sir James Chide—in the name of her own youth. And she heard her own answer: "Dear friend!—think!—remember! Let me stay!—let me stay! Am I not the child of sorrow? Here is my natural place—my only joy."

And she broke down into bitter helpless tears, pleading, it seemed, with things and persons inexorable.

Meanwhile, in Beechcote village, that night, a man slept lightly, thinking of Diana. Hugh Roughsedge, bronzed and full of honors, a man developed and matured, with the future in his hands, had returned that afternoon to his old home.

CHAPTER XXIII

"HOW is she?"

Mrs. Colwood shook her head sadly.

"Not well—and not happy."

The questioner was Hugh Roughsedge. The young soldier had walked up to Beechcote immediately after luncheon, finding it impossible to restrain his impatience longer. Diana had not expected him so soon, and had slipped out for her daily half-hour with Betty Dyson, who had had a slight stroke, and was failing fast. So that Mrs. Colwood was at Roughsedge's discretion. But he was not taking all the advantage of it that he might have done. The questions with which his mind was evidently teeming came out but slowly.

Little Mrs. Colwood surveyed him from time to time with sympathy and pleasure. Her round child-like eyes under their long lashes told her everything that as a woman she wanted to know. What an improvement in looks and manner—what indefinable gains in significance and self-possession! Danger, command, responsibility, those great tutors of men, had come in upon the solid yet malleable stuff of which the character was made, moulding and polishing, striking away defects, disengaging and accenting qualities. Who could ever have foreseen that Hugh might some day be described as "a man of the world"? Yet if that vague phrase were to be taken in its best sense, as describing a personality both

tempered and refined by the play of the world's forces upon it, it might certainly be now used of the man before her.

He was handsomer than ever; bronzed by Nigerian sun, all the superfluous flesh marched off him; every muscle in his frame taut and vigorous. And at the same time a new self-confidence—apparently quite unconscious, and the inevitable result of a strong and testing experience—was enabling him to bring his powers to bear and into play, as he had never yet done.

She recalled, with some confusion, that she — and Diana?—had tacitly thought of him as good, but stupid. On the contrary, was she, perhaps, in the presence of some one destined to do great things for his country? to lay hold—without intending it, as it were, and by the left hand—on high distinction? Were women, on the whole, bad judges of young men? She recalled a saying of Dr. Roughsedge, that "mothers never know how clever their sons are." Perhaps the blindness extends to other eyes than mothers?

Meanwhile, she got from him all the news she could. He had been, it seemed, concerned in the vast operation of bringing a new African Empire into being. She listened, dazzled, while in the very simplest, baldest phrases he described the curbing of slave-raiders, the winning of populations, the grappling with the desert, the opening out of river highways, whereof in his seven months he had been the fascinated beholder. As to his own exploits, he was ingeniously silent; but she knew them already. A military expedition against two revolted and slave-raiding emirs, holding strong positions on the great river; a few officers borrowed from home to stiffen a local militia; hot fighting against great odds; half a

million of men released from a reign of hell; tyranny broken, and the British *pax* extended over regions a third as large as India—smiling prosperity within its pale, bestial devastation and cruelty without — these things she knew, or had been able to imagine from the newspapers. According to him, it had been all the doing of other men. She knew better; but soon found it of no use to interrupt him.

Meanwhile she dared not ask him why he had come home. The campaign, indeed, was over; but he had been offered, it appeared, an administrative appointment.

"And you mean to go back?"

"Perhaps." He colored and looked restlessly out of the window.

Mrs. Colwood understood the look, and felt it was, indeed, hard upon him that he must put up with her so long. In reality, he too was conscious of new pleasure in an old acquaintance. He had forgotten what a dear little thing she was: how prettily round-faced, yet delicate—ethereal—in all her proportions, with the kindest eyes. She too had grown—by the mere contact with Diana's fate. Within her tiny frame the soul of her had risen to maternal heights, embracing and sustaining Diana.

He would have given the world to question her. But after her first answer to his first inquiry he had fallen tongue-tied on the subject of Diana, and Nigeria had absorbed conversation. She, on her side, wished him to know many things, but did not see how to begin upon them.

At last she attempted it.

"You have heard of our election? And what happened?"

He nodded. His mother had kept him informed. He understood Marsham had been badly hurt. Was it really so desperate?

In a cautious voice, watching the window, Muriel told what she knew. The recital was pitiful; but Hugh Roughsedge sat impassive, making no comments. She felt that in this quarter the young man was adamant.

"I suppose"—he turned his face from her—"Miss Mallory does not now go to Tallyn."

"No." She hesitated, looking at her companion, a score of feelings mingling in her mind. Then she broke out: "But she would like to!"

His startled look met hers; she was dismayed at what she had done. Yet, how not to give him warning?—this loyal young fellow, feeding himself on futile hopes!

"You mean—she still thinks—of Marsham?"

"Of nothing else," she said, impetuously—"of nothing else!"

He frowned and winced.

She resumed: "It is like her—so like her!—isn't it?"

Her soft pitiful eyes, into which the tears had sprung, pressed the question on him.

"I thought there was a cousin—Miss Drake?" he said, roughly.

Mrs. Colwood hesitated.

"It is said that all that is broken off."

He was silent. But his watch was on the garden. And suddenly, on the long grass path, Diana appeared, side by side with the Vicar. Roughsedge sprang up. Muriel was arrested by Diana's face, and by something rigid in the carriage of the head. What had the Vicar been saying to her?—she asked herself, angrily. Never

was there anything less discreet than the Vicar's handling of human nature!—female human nature, in particular.

Hugh Roughsedge opened the glass door, and went to meet them. Diana, at sight of him, gave a bewildered look, as though she scarcely knew him—then a perfunctory hand.

"Captain Roughsedge! They didn't tell me—"

"I want to speak to you," said the Vicar, peremptorily, to Mrs. Colwood; and he carried her off round the corner of the house.

Diana gazed after them, and Roughsedge thought he saw her totter.

"You look so ill!" he said, stooping over her. "Come and sit down."

His boyish nervousness and timidity left him. The strong man emerged and took command. He guided her to a garden seat, under a drooping lime. She sank upon the seat, quite unable to stand, beckoning him to stay by her. So he stood near, reluctantly waiting, his heart contracting at the sight of her.

At last she recovered herself and sat up.

"It was some bad news," she said, looking at him piteously, and holding out her hand again. "It is too bad of me to greet you like this."

He took her hand, and his own self-control broke down. He raised it to his lips with a stifled cry.

"Don't!—don't!" said Diana, helplessly. "Indeed—there is nothing the matter—I am only foolish. It is so—so good of you to care." She drew her hand from his, raised it to her brow, and, drawing a long breath, pushed back the hair from her face. She was like a person struggling against some torturing restraint, not knowing where to turn for help.

"ROUGHSEDGE STOOD NEAR, RELUCTANTLY WAITING"

But at the word "care" he pulled himself together. He sat down beside her, and plunged straight into his declaration. He went at it with the same resolute simplicity that he was accustomed to throw into his military duty, nor could she stop him in the least. His unalterable affection; his changed and improved prospects; a staff appointment at home if she accepted him; the Nigerian post if she refused him—these things he put before her in the natural manly speech of a young Englishman sorely in love, yet quite incapable of "high flights." It was very evident that he had pondered what he was to say through the days and nights of his exile; that he was doing precisely what he had always planned to do, and with his whole heart in the business. She tried once or twice to interrupt him, but he did not mean to be interrupted, and she was forced to hear it out.

At the end she gave a little gasp.

"Oh, Hugh!" His name, given him for the first time, fell so forlornly—it was such a breathing out of trouble and pity and despair—that his heart took another and a final plunge downward. He had known all through that there was no hope for him; this tone, this aspect settled it. But she stretched out her hands to him, tenderly—appealing. "Hugh—I shall have to tell you—but I am ashamed."

He looked at her in silence a moment, then asked her why. The tears rose brimming in her eyes—her hands still in his.

"Hugh—I—I—have always loved Oliver Marsham—and I—cannot think of any one else. You know what has happened?"

He saw the sob swelling in her white throat.

"Yes!" he said, passionately. "It is horrible. But you cannot go to him—you cannot marry him. He was a coward when he should have stood by you. He cannot claim you now."

She withdrew her hands.

"No!" The passion in her voice matched his own. "But I would give the world if he could—and would!"

There was a pause. Steadily the woman gained upon her own weakness and beat it down. She resumed:

"I must tell you—because—it is the only way—for us two—to be real friends again—and I want a friend so much. The news of Oliver is — is terrible. The Vicar had just seen Mr. Lankester — who is staying there. He is nearly blind—and the pain!" Her hand clinched—she threw her head back. "Oh! I can't speak of it! And it may go on for years. The doctors seem to be all at sea. They say he *ought* to recover—but they doubt whether he will. He has lost all heart—and hope—he can't help himself. He lies there like a log all day—despairing. And, please—what am *I* doing here?" She turned upon him impetuously, her cheeks flaming. "They want help—there is no one. Mrs. Fotheringham hardly ever comes. They think Lady Lucy is in a critical state of health too. She won't admit it—she does everything as usual. But she is very frail and ill, and it depresses Oliver. And I am here!—useless—and helpless. Oh, why can't I go?—why can't I go?" She laid her face upon her arms, on the bench, hiding it from him; but he saw the convulsion of her whole frame.

Beside a passion so absolute and so piteous he felt, his own claim shrink into nothingness—impossible, even, to give it voice again. He straightened himself in silence; with an effort of the whole man, the lover put on the friend.

"But you can go," he said, a little hoarsely, "if you feel like that."

She raised herself suddenly.

"How do I know that he wants me?—how do I know that he would even see me?"

Once more her cheeks were crimson. She had shown him her love unveiled; now he was to see her doubt—the shame that tormented her. He felt that it was to heal him she had spoken, and he could do nothing to repay her. He could neither chide her for a quixotic self-sacrifice, which might never be admitted or allowed; nor protest, on Marsham's behalf, against it, for he knew, in truth, nothing of the man; least of all could he plead for himself. He could only sit, staring like a fool, tongue-tied; till Diana, mastering, for his sake, the emotion to which, partly also for his sake, she had given rein, gradually led the conversation back to safer and cooler ground. All the little involuntary arts came in by which a woman regains command of herself, and thereby of her companion. Her hat tired her head; she removed it, and the beautiful hair underneath, falling into confusion, must be put in its place by skilled instinctive fingers, every movement answering to a similar self-restraining effort in the mind within. She dried her tears; she drew closer the black scarf round the shoulders of her white dress; she straightened the violets at her belt—Muriel's mid-day gift — till he beheld her, white and suffering indeed, but lovely and composed—queen of herself.

She made him talk of his adventures, and he obeyed her, partly to help her in the struggle he perceived, partly because in the position—beneath and beyond all hope—to which she had reduced him, it was the only way by which he could save anything out of the wreck. And

she bravely responded. She could and did lend him enough of her mind to make it worth his while. A friend should not come home to her from perils of land and sea, and find her ungrateful—a niggard of sympathy and praise.

So that when Dr. and Mrs. Roughsedge appeared, and Muriel returned with them, Mrs. Roughsedge, all on edge with anxiety, could make very little of what had—what must have—occurred. Diana, carved in white wax, but for the sensitive involuntary movements of lip and eyebrow, was listening to a description of an English embassy sent through the length and breadth of the most recently conquered province of Nigeria. The embassy took the news of peace and Imperial rule to a country devastated the year before by the most hideous of slave-raids. The road it marched by was strewn with the skeletons of slaves—had been so strewn probably for thousands of years. "One night my horse trod unawares on two skeletons—women—locked in each other's arms," said Hugh; "scores of others round them. In the evening we camped at a village where every able-bodied male had been killed the year before."

"Shot?" asked the doctor.

"Oh, dear, no! That would have been to waste ammunition. A limb was hacked off, and they bled to death."

His mother was looking at the speaker with all her eyes, but she did not hear a word he said. Was he pale or not?

Diana shuddered.

"And that is *stopped*—forever?" Her eyes were on the speaker.

"As long as our flag flies there," said the soldier, simply.

Her look kindled. For a moment she was the shadow, the beautiful shadow, of her old Imperialist self—the proud, disinterested lover of her country.

The doctor shook his head.

"Don't forget the gin, and the gin-traders on the other side, Master Hugh."

"They don't show their noses in the new provinces," said the young man, quietly; "we shall straighten that out too, in the long run—you'll see."

But Diana had ceased to listen. Mrs. Roughsedge, turning toward her, and with increasing foreboding, saw, as it were, the cloud of an inward agony, suddenly recalled, creep upon the fleeting brightness of her look, as the evening shade mounts upon and captures a sunlit hill-side. The mother, in spite of her native optimism, had never cherished any real hope of her son's success. But neither had she expected, on the other side, a certainty so immediate and so unqualified. She saw before her no settled or resigned grief. The Tallyn tragedy had transformed what had been almost a recovered serenity, a restored and patient equilibrium, into something violent, tumultuous, unstable—prophesying action. But what—poor child!—could the action be?

"Poor Hugh!" said Mrs. Roughsedge to her husband on their return, as she stood beside him, in his study. Her voice was low, for Hugh had only just gone up-stairs, and the little house was thinly built.

The doctor rubbed his nose thoughtfully, and then looked round him for a cigarette.

"Yes," he said, slowly; "but he enjoyed his walk home."

"Henry!"

Hugh had walked back to the village with Mrs. Colwood, who had an errand there, and it was true that he had talked much to her out of earshot of his parents, and had taken a warm farewell of her at the end.

"Why am I to be 'Henry'-ed?"—inquired the doctor, beginning on his cigarette.

"Because you must know," said his wife, in an energetic whisper, "that Hugh had almost certainly proposed to Miss Mallory before we arrived, and she had refused him!"

The doctor meditated.

"I still say that Hugh enjoyed his walk," he repeated; "I trust he will have others of the same kind—with the same person."

"Henry, you are really incorrigible!" cried his wife. "How can you make jokes—on such a thing—with that girl's face before you!"

"Not at all," said the doctor, protesting. "I am not making jokes, Patricia. But what you women never will understand is, that it was not a woman but a man that wrote—

> "'If she be not fair for me—
> What care I—'"

"Henry!" and his wife, beside herself, tried to stop his mouth with her hand.

"All right, I won't finish," said the doctor, placidly, disengaging himself. "But let me assure you, Patricia, whether you like it or not, that that is a male sentiment. I quite agree that no nice woman could have written it. But, then, Hugh is not a nice woman—nor am I."

"I thought you were so fond of her!" said his wife, reproachfully.

"Miss Mallory? I adore her. But, to tell the truth, Patricia, I want a daughter-in-law—and—and grandchildren," added the doctor, deliberately, stretching out his long limbs to the fire. "I admit that my remarks may be quite irrelevant and ridiculous—but I repeat that—in spite of everything—Hugh enjoyed his walk."

One October evening, a week later, Lady Lucy sat waiting for Sir James Chide at Tallyn Hall. Sir James had invited himself to dine and sleep, and Lady Lucy was expecting him in the up-stairs sitting-room, a medley of French clocks and china figures, where she generally sat now, in order to be within quick and easy reach of Oliver.

She was reading, or pretending to read, by the fire, listening all the time for the sound of the carriage outside. Meanwhile, the silence of the immense house oppressed her. It was broken only by the chiming of a carillon clock in the hall below. The little tune it played, fatuously gay, teased her more insistently each time she heard it. It must really be removed. She wondered Oliver had not already complained of it.

A number of household and estate worries oppressed her thoughts. How was she to cope with them? Capable as she was, "John" had always been there to advise her, in emergency—or Oliver. She suspected the house-steward of dishonesty. And the agent of the estate had brought her that morning complaints of the head game-keeper that were most disquieting. What did they want with game-keepers now? Who would ever shoot at Tallyn again? With impatience she felt herself entangled in the endless machinery of wealth and the pleasures of wealth, so easy to set in motion, and so

difficult to stop, even when all the savor has gone out of it. She was a tired, broken woman, with an invalid son; and the management of her great property, in which her capacities and abilities had taken for so long an imperious and instinctive delight, had become a mere burden. She longed to creep into some quiet place, alone with Oliver, out of reach of this army of servants and dependents, these impassive and unresponsive faces.

The crunching of the carriage wheels on the gravel outside gave her a start of something like pleasure. Among the old friends there was no one now she cared so much to see as Sir James Chide. Sir James had lately left Parliament and politics, and had taken a judgeship. She understood that he had lost interest in politics after and in consequence of John Ferrier's death; and she knew, of course, that he had refused the Attorney-Generalship, on the ground of the treatment meted out to his old friend and chief. During the month of Oliver's second election, moreover, she had been very conscious of Sir James's hostility to her son. Intercourse between him and Tallyn had practically ceased.

Since the accident, however, he had been kind—very kind.

The door opened, and Sir James was announced. She greeted him with a tremulous and fluttering warmth that for a moment embarrassed her visitor, accustomed to the old excess of manner and dignity, wherewith she kept her little world in awe. He saw, too, that the havoc wrought by age and grief had gone forward rapidly since he had seen her last.

"I am afraid there is no better news of Oliver?" he said, gravely, as he sat down beside her.

She shook her head.

"We are in despair. Nothing touches the pain but morphia. And he has lost heart himself so much during the last fortnight."

"You have had any fresh opinion?"

"Yes. The last man told me he still believed the injury was curable, but that Oliver must do a great deal for himself. And that he seems incapable of doing. It is, of course, the shock to the nerves, and—the general—disappointment—"

Her voice shook. She stared into the fire.

"You mean—about politics?" said Sir James, after a pause.

"Yes. Whenever I speak cheerfully to him, he asks me what there is to live for. He has been driven out of politics—by a conspiracy—"

Sir James moved impatiently.

"With health he would soon recover everything," he said, rather shortly.

She made no reply, and her shrunken faded look—as of one with no energy for hope—again roused his pity.

"Tell me," he said, bending toward her—"I don't ask from idle curiosity—but—has there been any truth in the rumor of Oliver's engagement to Miss Drake?"

Lady Lucy raised her head sharply. The light came back to her eyes.

"She was engaged to him, and three weeks after his accident she threw him over."

Sir James made a sound of amazement. Lady Lucy went on:

"She left him and me, barely a fortnight afterward, to go to a big country-house party in the north. That will show you—what she's made of. Then she wrote—a hypocritical letter—putting it on *him*. *He* must not

be agitated, nor feel her any burden upon him; so, for *his* sake, she broke it off. Of course, they were to be cousins and friends again just as before. She had arranged it all to her own satisfaction—and was meanwhile flirting desperately, as we heard from various people in the north, with Lord Philip Darcy. Oliver showed me her letter, and at last told me the whole story. I persuaded him not to answer it. A fortnight ago, she wrote again, proposing to come back here—to 'look after' us—poor things! This time, *I* replied. She would like Tallyn, no doubt, as a place of retreat, should other plans fail; but it will not be open to her!"

It was not energy now—vindictive energy—that was lacking to the personality before him!

"An odious young woman" exclaimed Sir James, lifting hands and eyebrows. "I am afraid I always thought so, saving your presence, Lady Lucy. However, she will want a retreat; for her plans—in the quarter you name—have not a chance of success."

"I am delighted to hear it!" said Lady Lucy, still erect and flushed. "What do you know?"

"Simply that Lord Philip is not in the least likely to marry her, having, I imagine, views in quite other quarters—so I am told. But he is the least scrupulous of men—and no doubt if, at Eastham, she threw herself into his arms—'what mother's son,' et cetera. Only, if she imagined herself to have caught him—such an old and hardened stager!—in a week—her abilities are less than I supposed."

"Alicia's self-conceit was always her weak point."

But as she spoke the force imparted by resentment died away. Lady Lucy sank back in her chair.

"And Oliver felt it very much?" asked Sir James, after a pause, his shrewd eyes upon her.

"He was wounded, of course—he has been more depressed since; but I have never believed that he was in love with her."

Sir James did not pursue the subject, but the vivacity of the glance bent now on the fire, now on his companion, betrayed the marching thoughts behind.

"Will Oliver see me this evening?" he inquired, presently.

"I hope so. He promised me to make the effort."

A servant knocked at the door. It was Oliver's valet.

"Please, my lady, Mr. Marsham wished me to say he was afraid he would not be strong enough to see Sir James Chide to-night. He is very sorry—and would Sir James be kind enough to come and see him after breakfast to-morrow?"

Lady Lucy threw up her hands in a little gesture of despair. Then she rose, and went to speak to the servant in the doorway.

When she returned she looked whiter and more shrivelled than before.

"Is he worse to-night?" asked Sir James, gently.

"It is the pain," she said, in a muffled voice; "and we can't touch it—yet. He mustn't have any more morphia—yet."

She sat down once more. Sir James, the best of gossips, glided off into talk of London, and of old common friends, trying to amuse and distract her. But he realized that she scarcely listened to him, and that he was talking to a woman whose life was being ground away between a last affection and the torment it had

power to cause her. A new Lady Lucy, indeed! Had any one ever dared to pity her before?

Meanwhile, five miles off, a girl whom he loved as a daughter was eating her heart out for sorrow over this mother and son—consumed, as he guessed, with the wild desire to offer them, in any sacrificial mode they pleased, her youth and her sweet self. In one way or another he had found out that Hugh Roughsedge had been sent about his business—of course, with all the usual softening formulæ.

And now there was a kind of mute conflict going on between himself and Mrs. Colwood on the one side, and Diana on the other side.

No, she should not spend and waste her youth in the vain attempt to mend this house of tragedy!—it was not to be tolerated—not to be thought of. She would suffer, but she would get over it; and Oliver would probably die. Sooner or later she would begin life afresh, if only he was able to stand between her and the madness in her heart.

But as he sat there, looking at Lady Lucy, he realized that it might have been better for his powers and efficacy as a counsellor if he, too, had held aloof from this house of pain.

CHAPTER XXIV

IT was about ten o'clock at night. Lankester, who had arrived from London an hour before, had said good-night to Lady Lucy and Sir James, and had slipped into Marsham's room. Marsham had barred his door that evening against both his mother and Sir James. But Lankester was not excluded.

Off and on and in the intervals of his parliamentary work he had been staying at Tallyn for some days. A letter from Lady Lucy, in reply to an inquiry, had brought him down. Oliver had received him with few words—indeed, with an evident distaste for words; but at the end of the first day's visit had asked him abruptly, peremptorily even, to come again.

When he entered Marsham's room he found the invalid asleep under the influence of morphia. The valet, a young fellow, was noiselessly putting things straight. Lankester noticed that he looked pale.

"A bad time?" he said, in a whisper, standing beside the carefully regulated spinal couch on which Marsham was sleeping.

"Awful, sir. He was fair beside himself till we gave him the morphia."

"Is there anybody sitting up?"

"No. He'll be quiet now for six or seven hours. I shall be in the next room."

The young man spoke wearily. It was clear that the

moral strain of what he had just seen had weighed upon him as much as the fatigue of the day's attendance.

"Come!" said Lankester, looking at him. "You want a good night. Go to my room. I'll lie down there." He pointed to Marsham's bedroom, now appropriated to the valet, while the master, for the sake of space and cheerfulness, had been moved into the sitting-room. The servant hesitated, protested, and was at last persuaded, being well aware of Marsham's liking for this queer, serviceable being.

Lankester took various directions from him, and packed him off. Then, instead of going to the adjoining room, he chose a chair beside a shaded lamp, and said to himself that he would sleep by the fire.

Presently the huge house sank into a silence even more profound than that in which it was now steeped by day. A cold autumn wind blew round about it. After midnight the wind dropped, and the temperature with it. The first severe frost laid its grip on forest and down and garden. Silently the dahlias and the roses died, the leaves shrivelled and blackened, and a cold and glorious moon rose upon the ruins of the summer.

Lankester dozed and woke, keeping up the fire, and wrapping himself in an eider-down, with which the valet had provided him. In the small hours he walked across the room to look at Marsham. He was lying still and breathing heavily. His thick fair hair, always slightly gray from the time he was thirty, had become much grayer of late; the thin handsome face was drawn and damp, the eyes cavernous, the lips bloodless. Even in sleep his aspect showed what he had suffered.

Poor, poor old fellow!

Lankester's whole being softened into pity. Yet he

had no illusions as to the man before him—a man of inferior *morale* and weak will, incapable, indeed, of the clever brutalities by which the wicked flourish; incapable also of virtues that must, after all, be tolerably common, or the world would run much more lamely than it does. Straight, honorable, unselfish fellows—Lankester knew scores of them, rich and poor, clever and slow, who could and did pass the tests of life without flinching; who could produce in any society—as politicians or greengrocers—an impression of uprightness and power, an effect of character, that Marsham, for all his ability, had never produced, or, in the long run, and as he came to be known, had never sustained.

Well, what then? In the man looking down on Marsham not a tinge of pharisaic condemnation mingled with the strange clearness of his judgment. What are we all—the best of us? Lankester had not parted, like the majority of his contemporaries, with the "sense of sin." A vivid, spiritual imagination, trained for years on prayer and reverie, showed him the world and human nature—his own first and foremost—everywhere flecked and stained with evil. For the man of religion the difference between saint and sinner has never been as sharp as for the man of the world; it is for the difference between holiness and sin that he reserves his passion. And the stricken or repentant sinner is at all times nearer to his heart than the men "who need no repentance."

Moreover, it is in men like Lankester that the ascetic temper common to all ages and faiths is perpetually reproduced, the temper which makes of suffering itself a divine and sacred thing—the symbol of a mystery. In his own pity for this emaciated arrested youth he read the pledge of a divine sympathy, the secret voice of a

God suffering for and with man, which, in its myriad forms, is the primeval faith of the race. Where a thinker of another type would have seen mere aimless waste and mutilation, this evangelical optimist bared the head and bent the knee. The spot whereon he stood was holy ground, and above this piteous sleeper heavenly dominations, princedoms, powers, hung in watch.

He sank, indeed, upon his knees beside the sleeper. In the intense and mystical concentration, which the habit of his life had taught him, the prayer to which he committed himself took a marvellous range without ever losing its detail, its poignancy. The pain, moral and physical, of man—pain of the savage, the slave, the child; the miseries of innumerable persons he had known, whose stories had been confided to him, whose fates he had shared; the anguish of irreparable failure, of missed, untasted joy; agonies brutal or obscure, of nerve and brain!—his mind and soul surrendered themselves to these impressions, shook under the storm and scourge of them. His prayer was not his own; it seemed to be the Spirit wrestling with Itself, and rending his own weak life.

He drew nearer to Marsham, resting his forehead on the bed. The firelight threw the shadow of his gaunt kneeling figure on the white walls. And at last, after the struggle, there seemed to be an effluence—a descending, invading love—overflowing his own being—enwrapping the sufferer before him—silencing the clamor of a weeping world. And the dual mind of the modern, even in Lankester, wavered between the two explanations: "It is myself," said the critical intellect, "the intensification and projection of myself." "*It is God!*" replied the soul.

Marsham, meanwhile, as the morning drew on, and as the veil of morphia between him and reality grew thinner, was aware of a dream slowly drifting into consciousness—of an experience that grew more vivid as it progressed. Some one was in the room; he moved uneasily, lifted his head, and saw indistinctly a figure in the shadows standing near the smouldering fire. It was not his servant; and suddenly his dream mingled with what he saw, and his heart began to throb.

"Ferrier!" he called, under his breath. The figure turned, but in his blindness and semi-consciousness he did not recognize it.

"I want to speak to you," he said, in the same guarded, half-whispered voice. "Of course, I had no right to do it, but—"

His voice dropped and his eyelids closed.

Lankester advanced from the fire. He saw Marsham was not really awake, and he dreaded to rouse him completely, lest it should only be to the consciousness of pain. He stooped over him gently, and spoke his name.

"Yes," said Marsham, murmuring, without opening his eyes. "There's no need for you to rub it in. I behaved like a beast, and Barrington—"

The voice became inarticulate again. The prostration and pallor of the speaker, the feebleness of the tone—nothing could have been more pitiful. An idea rushed upon Lankester. He again bent over the bed.

"Don't think of it any more," he said. "It's forgotten!"

A slight and ghastly smile showed on Marsham's lip as he lay with closed eyes. "Forgotten! No, by Jove!" Then, after an uneasy movement, he said, in a stronger

and irritable voice, which seemed to come from another region of consciousness:

"It would have been better to have burned the paper. One can't get away from the thing. It—it disturbs me—"

"What paper?" said Lankester, close to the dreamer's ear.

"The *Herald*," said Marsham, impatiently.

"Where is it?"

"In that cabinet by the fire."

"Shall I burn it?"

"Yes—don't bother me!" Evidently he now thought he was speaking to his valet, and a moan of pain escaped him. Lankester walked over to the cabinet and opened the top drawer. He saw a folded newspaper lying within it. After a moment's hesitation he lifted it, and perceived by the light of the night-lamp that it was the *Herald* of August 2—the famous number issued on the morning of Ferrier's death. All the story of the communicated article and the "Barrington letter" ran through his mind. He stood debating with himself, shaken by emotion. Then he deliberately took the paper to the fire, stirred the coals, and, tearing up the paper, burned it piece by piece.

After it was done he walked back to Marsham's side. "I have burned the paper," he said, kneeling down by him.

Marsham, who was breathing lightly with occasional twitchings of the brow, took no notice. But after a minute he said, in a steady yet thrilling voice:

"Ferrier!"

Silence.

"Ferrier!" The tone of the repeated word brought

the moisture to Lankester's eyes. He took the dreamer's hand in his, pressing it. Marsham returned the pressure, first strongly, again more feebly. Then a wave of narcotic sleep returned upon him, and he seemed to sink into it profoundly.

Next morning, as Marsham, after his dressing, was lying moody and exhausted on his pillows, he suddenly said to his servant:

"I want something out of that cabinet by the fire."

"Yes, sir." The man moved toward it obediently.

"Find a newspaper in the top drawer, folded up small—on the right-hand side."

Richard looked.

"I am sorry, sir, but there is nothing in the drawer at all."

"Nonsense!" said Marsham, angrily. "You've got the wrong drawer!"

The whole cabinet was searched to no purpose. Marsham grew very pale. He must, of course, have destroyed the paper himself, and his illness had effaced his memory of the act, as of other things. Yet he could not shake off an impression of mystery. Twice now, weeks after Ferrier's death, he seemed to have been in Ferrier's living presence, under conditions very unlike those of an ordinary dream. He could only remind himself how easily the brain plays tricks upon a man in his state.

After breakfast, Sir James Chide was admitted. But Oliver was now in the state of obsession, when the whole being, already conscious of a certain degree of pain, dreads the approach of a much intenser form—hears it

as the footfall of a beast of prey, drawing nearer room by room, and can think of nothing else but the suffering it foresees, and the narcotic which those about him deal out to him so grudgingly, rousing in him, the while, a secret and silent fury. He answered Sir James in monosyllables, lying, dressed, upon his sofa, the neuralgic portion of the spine packed and cushioned from any possible friction, his forehead drawn and frowning.

Sir James shrank from asking him about himself. But it was useless to talk of politics; Oliver made no response, and was evidently no longer abreast even of the newspapers.

"Does your man read you the *Times?*" asked Sir James, noticing that it lay unopened beside him.

Oliver nodded. "There was a dreadful being my mother found a fortnight ago. I got rid of him."

He had evidently not strength to be more explicit. But Sir James had heard from Lady Lucy of the failure of her secretarial attempt.

"I hear they talk of moving you for the winter."

"They talk of it. I shall oppose it."

"I hope not!—for Lady Lucy's sake. She is so hopeful about it, and she is not fit herself to spend the winter in England."

"My mother must go," said Oliver, closing his eyes. "She will never leave you."

Marsham made no reply; then, without closing his eyes again, he said, between his teeth: "What is the use of going from one hell to another hell—through a third—which is the worst of all?"

"You dread the journey?" said Sir James, gently. "But there are ways and means."

"No!" Oliver's voice was sudden and loud. "There are none!—that make any difference."

Sir James was left perplexed, cudgelling his brains as to what to attempt next. It was Marsham, however, who broke the silence. With his dimmed sight he looked, at last, intently, at his companion.

"Is—is Miss Mallory still at Beechcote?"

Sir James moved involuntarily.

"Yes, certainly."

"You see a great deal of her?"

"I do—I—" Sir James cleared his throat a little—"I look upon her as my adopted daughter."

"I should like to be remembered to her."

"You shall be," said Sir James, rising. "I will give her your message. Meanwhile, may I tell Lady Lucy that you feel a little easier this morning?"

Oliver slowly and sombrely shook his head. Then, however, he made a visible effort.

"But I want to see her. Will you tell her?"

Lady Lucy, however, was already in the room. Probably she had heard the message from the open doorway where she often hovered. Oliver held out his hand to her, and she stooped and kissed him. She asked him a few low-voiced questions, to which he mostly answered by a shake of the head. Then she attempted some ordinary conversation, during which it was very evident that the sick man wished to be left alone.

She and Sir James retreated to her sitting-room, and there Lady Lucy, sitting helplessly by the fire, brushed away some tears of which she was only half conscious. Sir James walked up and down, coming at last to a stop beside her.

"It seems to me this is as much a moral as a physical

breakdown. Can nothing be done to take him out of himself?—give him fresh heart?"

"We have tried everything — suggested everything. But it seems impossible to rouse him to make an effort."

Sir James resumed his walk—only to come to another stop.

"Do you know—that he just now—sent a message by me to Miss Mallory?"

Lady Lucy started.

"Did he?" she said, faintly, her eyes on the blaze. He came up to her.

"*There* is a woman who would never have deserted you!—or him!" he said, in a burst of irrepressible feeling, which would out.

Lady Lucy's glance met his—silently, a little proudly. She said nothing and presently he took his leave.

The day wore on. A misty sunshine enwrapped the beech woods. The great trees stood marked here and there by the first fiery summons of the frost. Their supreme moment was approaching which would strike them, head to foot, into gold and amber, in a purple air. Lady Lucy took her drive among them as a duty, but between her and the enchanted woodland there was a gulf fixed.

She paid a visit to Oliver, trembling, as she always did, lest some obscure catastrophe, of which she was ever vaguely in dread, should have developed. But she found him in a rather easier phase, with Lankester, who had just returned from town, reading aloud to him. She gave them tea, thinking, as she did so, of the noisy parties gathered so recently, during the election weeks.

round the tea-tables in the hall. And then she returned to her own room to write some letters.

She looked once more with distaste and weariness at the pile of letters and notes awaiting her. All the business of the house, the estate, the village—she was getting an old woman; she was weary of it. And with sudden bitterness she remembered that she had a daughter, and that Isabel had never been a real day's help to her in her life. Where was she now? Campaigning in the north—speaking at a bye-election—lecturing for the suffrage. Since the accident she had paid two flying visits to her mother and brother. Oliver had got no help from her—nor her mother; she was the Mrs. Jellyby of a more hypocritical day. Yet Lady Lucy in her youth had been a very motherly mother; she could still recall in the depths of her being the thrill of baby palms pressed "against the circle of the breast."

She sat down to her task, when the door opened behind her. A footman came in, saying something which she did not catch. "My letters are not ready yet"—she threw over her shoulder, irritably, without looking at him. The door closed. But some one was still in the room. She turned sharply in astonishment.

"May I disturb you, Lady Lucy?" said a tremulous voice.

She saw a tall and slender woman, in black, bending toward her, with a willowy appealing grace, and eyes that beseeched. Diana Mallory stood before her. There was a pause. Then Lady Lucy rose slowly, laid down her spectacles, and held out her hand.

"It is very kind of you to come and see me," she said, mechanically. "Will you sit down?"

Diana gazed at her, with the childish short-sighted

pucker of the brow that Lady Lucy remembered well. Then she came closer, still holding Lady Lucy's hand.

"Sir James thought I might come," she said, breathlessly. "Isn't there—isn't there anything I might do? I wanted you to let me help you—like a secretary—won't you? Sir James thought you looked so tired—and this big place!—I am sure there are things I might do—and oh! it would make me so happy!"

Now she had her two hands clasping, fondling Lady Lucy's. Her eyes shone with tears, her mouth trembled.

"Oh, you must—you must!" she cried, suddenly; "don't let's remember anything but that we were friends—that you were so kind to me—you and Mr. Oliver—in the spring. I can't bear sitting there at Beechcote doing nothing—amusing myself—when you—and Mr. Oliver—"

She stopped, forcing back the tears that would drive their way up, studying in dismay the lined and dwindled face before her. Lady Lucy colored deeply. During the months which had elapsed since the broken engagement, she, even in her remote and hostile distance, had become fully aware of the singular prestige, the homage of a whole district's admiration and tenderness, which had gathered round Diana. She had resented the prestige and the homage, as telling against Oliver, unfairly. Yet as she looked at her visitor she felt the breath of their ascendency. Tender courage and self-control—the woman, where the girl had been — a nature steadied and ennobled—these facts and victories spoke from Diana's face, her touch; they gave even something of maternity to her maiden youth.

"You come to a sad house," said Lady Lucy, holding her away a little.

"I know." The voice was quivering and sweet. "But he will recover—of course he'll recover!"

Lady Lucy shook her head.

"He seems to have no will to recover."

Then her limbs failed her. She sank into a chair by the fire, and there was Diana on a stool at her feet—timidly daring—dropping soft caresses on the hand she held, drawing out the tragic history of the preceding weeks, bringing, indeed, to this sad and failing mother what she had perforce done without till now—that electric sympathy of women with each other which is the natural relief and sustenance of the sex.

Lady Lucy forgot her letters—forgot, in her mind-weariness, all the agitating facts about this girl that she had once so vividly remembered. She had not the strength to battle and hold aloof. Who now could talk of marrying or giving in marriage? They met under a shadow of death; the situation between them reduced to bare elemental things.

"You'll stay and dine with me?" she said at last, feebly. "We'll send you home. The carriages have nothing to do. And"—she straightened herself—"you must see Oliver. He will know that you are here."

Diana said nothing. Lady Lucy rose and left the room. Diana leaned her head against the chair in which the older lady had been sitting, and covered her eyes. Her whole being was gathered into the moment of waiting.

Lady Lucy returned and beckoned. Once more Diana found herself hurrying along the ugly, interminable corridors with which she had been so familiar in the spring. The house had never seemed to her so forlorn. They paused at an open door, guarded by a screen.

"Go in, please," said Lady Lucy, making room for her to pass.

Diana entered, shaken with inward fear. She passed the screen, and there beyond it was an invalid couch—a man lying on it—and a hand held out to her.

That shrunken and wasted being the Oliver Marsham of two months before! Her heart beat against her breast. Surely she was looking at the irreparable! Her high courage wavered and sank.

But Marsham did not perceive it. He saw, as in a cloud, the lovely oval of the face, the fringed eyes, the bending form.

"Will you sit down?" he said, hoarsely.

She took a chair beside him, still holding his hand. It seemed as though she were struck dumb by what she saw. He inquired if she was at Beechcote.

"Yes." Her head drooped. "But I want Lady Lucy to let me come and stay here—a little."

"No one ought to stay here," he said, abruptly, two spots of feverish color appearing on his cheeks. "Sir James would advise you not. So do I."

She looked up softly.

"Your mother is so tired; she wants help. Won't you let me?"

Their eyes met. His hand trembled violently in hers.

"Why did you come?" he said, suddenly, breathing fast.

She found no words, only tears. She had relinquished his hand, but he stretched it out again and touched her bent head.

"There's no time left," he said, impatiently, "to—to fence in. Look here! I can't stand this pain many

minutes more." He moved with a stifled groan. "They'll give me morphia—it's the only thing. But I want you to know. I was engaged to Alicia Drake—after—we broke it off. And I never loved her—not for a moment—and she knew it. Then, as soon as this happened she left us. There was poetic justice, wasn't it? Who can blame her? I don't. I want you to know—what sort of a fellow I am."

Diana had recovered her strength. She raised his hand, and leaned her face upon it.

"Let me stay," she repeated—"let me stay!"

"No!" he said, with emphasis. "You should only stay if I might tell you—I am a miserable creature—but I love you! And I may be a miserable creature—in Chide's opinion—everybody's. But I am not quite such a cur as that."

"Oliver!" She slipped to her knees. "Oliver! don't send me away!" All her being spoke in the words. Her dark head sank upon his shoulder, he felt her fresh cheek against his. With a cry he pressed her to him.

"I am dying—and—I—I am weak," he said, incoherently. He raised her hand as it lay across his breast and kissed it. Then he dropped it despairingly.

"The awful thing is that when the pain comes I care about nothing—not even you—*nothing*. And it's coming now. Go!—dearest. Good-night. To-morrow!—Call my servant." And as she fled she heard a sound of anguish that was like a sword in her own heart.

His servant hurried to him; in the passage outside Diana found Lady Lucy. They went back to the sitting-room together.

"The morphia will ease him," said Lady Lucy, with

painful composure, putting her arm round the girl's shoulders. "Did he tell you he was dying?"

Diana nodded, unable to speak.

"It may be so. But the doctors don't agree." Then with a manner that recalled old days: "May I ask—I don't know that I have the right—what he said to you?"

She had withdrawn her arm, and the two confronted each other.

"Perhaps you won't allow it," said Diana, piteously. "He said I might only stay, if—if he might tell me—he loved me."

"Allow it?" said Lady Lucy, vaguely—"allow it?"

She fell into her chair, and Diana looked down upon her, hanging on the next word.

Lady Lucy made various movements as though to speak, which came to nothing.

"I have no one—but him," she said at last, with pathetic irrelevance. "No one. Isabel—"

Her voice failed her. Diana held out her hands, the tears running down her cheeks. "Dear Lady Lucy, let me! I am yours—and Oliver's."

"It will, perhaps, be only a few weeks—or months—and then he will be taken from us."

"But give me the right to those weeks. You wouldn't—you wouldn't separate us now!"

Lady Lucy suddenly broke down. Diana clung to her with tears, and in that hour she became as a daughter to the woman who had sentenced her youth. Lady Lucy asked no pardon in words, to Diana's infinite relief; but the surrender of weakness and sorrow was complete. "Sir James will forbid it," she said at last, when she had recovered her calm.

"No one shall forbid it!" said Diana, rising with a

smile. "Now, may I answer some of those letters for you?"

For some weeks after this Diana went backward and forward daily, or almost daily, between Beechcote and Tallyn. Then she migrated to Tallyn altogether, and Muriel Colwood with her. Before and after that migration wisdom had been justified of her children in the person of the doctor. Hugh Roughsedge's leave had been prolonged, owing to a slight but troublesome wound in the arm, of which he had made nothing on coming home. No wound could have been more opportune—more friendly to the doctor's craving for a daughter-in-law. It kept the Captain at Beechcote, but it did not prevent him from coming over every Sunday to Tallyn to bring flowers or letters, or news from the village; and it was positively benefited by such mild exercise as a man may take, in company with a little round-eyed woman, feather-light and active, yet in relation to Diana, like a tethered dove, that can only take short flights. Only here it was a tether self-imposed and of the heart.

There was no direct wooing, however, and for weeks their talk was all of Diana. Then the Captain's arm got well, and Nigeria called. But Muriel would not have allowed him to say a word before departure had it not been for Diana—and the doctor—who were suddenly found to have entered, in regard to this matter, upon a league and covenant not to be resisted. Whether the doctor opened Diana's eyes need not be inquired; it is certain that if, all the while, in Oliver's room, she and Lady Lucy had not been wrestling hour by hour with death—or worse—Diana would have wanted no one to

open them. When she did understand, there was no opposing her. She pleaded—not without tears—to be given the happiness of knowing they were pledged, and her Muriel safe in harbor. So Roughsedge had his say; a quiet engagement began its course in the world; Brookshire as yet knew nothing; and the doctor triumphed over Patricia.

During this time Sir James Chide watched the development of a situation he had not been able to change with a strange mixture of revolt and sympathy. Sometimes he looked beyond the tragedy which he thought inevitable to a recovered and normal life for Diana; sometimes he felt a dismal certainty that when Oliver had left her, that recovered life could only shape itself to ascetic and self-renouncing ends. Had she belonged to his own church, she would no doubt have become a "religious"; and he would have felt it the natural solution. Outside the Catholic Church, the same need takes shape—he thought—in forms less suited to a woman's weakness, less conducive to her dignity.

All through he resented the sacrifice of a being so noble, true, and tender to a love, in his eyes, so unfitting and derogatory. Not all the pathos of suffering could blunt his sense of Marsham's inferiority, or make him think it "worth while."

Then, looking deeper, he saw the mother in the child; and in Diana's devotion, mysterious influences, flowing from her mother's fate—from the agony, the sin, the last tremulous hope, and piteous submission of Juliet Sparling. He perceived that in this broken, tortured happiness to which Diana had given herself there was some sustaining or consoling element that nothing more normal or more earthly would have brought her; he guessed

at spiritual currents and forces linking the dead with the living, and at a soul heroically calm among them, sending forth rays into the darkness. His religion, which was sincere, enabled him to understand her; his affection, his infinite delicacy of feeling, helped her.

Meanwhile, Diana and Lankester became the sustaining angels of a stricken house. But not all their tenderness and their pity could, in the end, do much for the two sufferers they tried to comfort. In Oliver's case the spinal pain and disorganization increased, the blindness also; Lady Lucy became steadily feebler and more decrepit. At last all life was centred on one hope—the coming of a great French specialist, a disciple of Charcot's, recommended by the English Ambassador in Paris, who was an old friend and kinsman of Lady Lucy.

But before he arrived Diana took a resolution. She went very early one morning to see Sir James Chide. He was afterward closeted with Lady Lucy, and he went up to town the following day on Diana's business. The upshot of it all was that on the morning of New Year's Eve a marriage was celebrated in Oliver Marsham's room by the Rector of Tallyn and Mr. Lavery. It was a wedding which, to all who witnessed it, was among the most heart-rending experiences of life. Oliver, practically blind, could not see his bride, and only morphia enabled him to go through it. Mrs. Fotheringham was to have been present; but there was a feminist congress in Paris, and she was detained at the last moment. The French specialist came. He made a careful examination, but would give no decided opinion. He was to stay a week at Tallyn in order to watch the case, and he reserved his judgment. Meanwhile he gave certain directions as to local treatment, and he asked that

a new drug might be tried during the night instead of the second dose of morphia usually given. The hearts of all in charge of the invalid sank as they foresaw the inevitable struggle.

In the evening the new doctor paid a second visit to his patient. Diana saw him afterward alone. He was evidently touched by the situation in the house, and, cautious as he was, allowed himself a few guarded sentences throwing light on the doubt—which was in effect a hope—in his own mind.

"Madame, it is a very difficult case. The emaciation, the weakness, the nerve depression—even if there were no organic disease—are alone enough to threaten life. The morphia is, of course, a contributing cause. The question before us is: Have we here a case of irreparable disease caused by the blow, or a case of nervous shock producing all the symptoms of disease—pain, blindness, emaciation—but ultimately curable? That is what we have to solve."

Diana's eyes implored him.

"Give him hope," she said, with intensity. "For weeks—months—he has never allowed himself a moment's hope."

The doctor reflected.

"We will do what we can," he said, slowly. "Meanwhile, cheerfulness!—all the cheerfulness possible."

Diana's faint, obedient smile, as she rose to leave the room, touched him afresh. Just married, he understood. These are the things that women do!

As he opened the door for her he said, with some hesitation: "You have, perhaps, heard of some of the curious effects that a railway collision produces. A man who has been in a collision and received a blow suffers after-

ward great pain, loss of walking power, impairment of vision, and so forth. The man's suffering is real—the man himself perfectly sincere—his doctor diagnoses incurable injury—the jury awards him damages. Yet, in a certain number of instances, the man recovers. Have we here an aggravated form of the same thing? *Ah, madame, courage!*"

For in the doorway he saw her fall back against the lintel for support. The hope that he infused tested her physically more severely than the agonies of the preceding weeks. But almost immediately she controlled herself, smiled at him again, and went.

That night various changes were made at Tallyn. Diana's maid unpacked, in the room communicating with Marsham's; and Diana, pale and composed, made a new arrangement with Oliver's male nurse. She was to take the nursing of the first part of the night, and he was to relieve her at three in the morning. To her would fall the administration of the new medicine.

At eleven o'clock all was still in the house. Diana opened the door of Oliver's room with a beating heart. She wore a dressing-gown of some white stuff; her black hair, released from the combs of the day, was loosely rolled up, and curled round her neck and temples. She came in with a gentle deliberate step; it was but a few hours since the ceremony of the morning, but the transormation in her was instinctive and complete. To-night she was the wife—alone with her husband.

She saw that he was not asleep, and she went and knelt down beside him.

"Oliver, darling!"

He passed his hand over her hair.

"I have been waiting for you — it is our wedding night."

She hid her face against him.

"Oh! you angel!" he murmured to her—"angel of consolation! When I am gone, say to yourself: 'I drew him out of the pit, and helped him to die'; say 'he suffered, and I forgave him everything'; say 'he was my husband, and I carried him on my heart—so.'" He moved toward her. She put her arms under his head and drew him to her breast, stooping over him and kissing him.

So the first part of the night went by, he very much under the influence of morphia, and not in pain; murmured words passing at intervals between them, the outward signs of an inward and ineffable bond. Often, as she sat motionless beside him, the thought of her mother stirred in her heart—father, mother, husband—close, close all of them—"closer than hands and feet"—one with her and one with God.

About two o'clock she gave him the new drug, he piteously consenting for her sake. Then in a mortal terror she resumed her place beside him. In a few minutes surely the pain, the leaping hungry pain would be upon him, and she must see him wrestle with it defenceless. She sat holding her breath, all existence gathered into fear.

But the minutes passed. She felt the tension of his hand relax. He went to sleep so gently that in her infinite relief she too dropped into sleep, her head beside his, the black hair mingling with the gray on the same pillow.

The servant coming in, as he had been told, looked at them in astonishment, and stole away again.

An hour or so later Oliver woke.

"I have had no morphia, and I am not in pain. My God! what does it mean?"

Trembling, he put out his hand. Yes!—Diana was there—asleep in her chair. His *wife!*

His touch roused her, and as she bent over him he saw her dimly in the dim light—her black hair, her white dress.

"You can bring that old French fellow here whenever you like," he said, holding her. Then, faintly, his eyes closed: "This is New Year's Day."

Once more Diana's kisses fell "on the tired heart like rain"; and when she left him he lay still, wrapped in a tangle of thought which his weakness could not unravel. Presently he dropped again into sleep.

Diana too slept, the sleep of a young exhaustion; and when she woke up, it was to find her being flooded with an upholding, enkindling joy, she knew not how or whence. She threw open the window to the frosty dawn, thinking of the year before and her first arrival at Beechcote. And there, in the eastern sky—no radiant planet—but a twinkling star, in an ethereal blue; and from the valley below, dim joyous sounds of bells.

THE END

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